Introduction

It was 10 August 1588 in the North Sea, and the summer weather was unseasonably bad. Before a brisk south-westerly gale, with her storm-canvas set, ran the English royal galleon *Victory*, scarred by recent battle. Her gaudily painted upperworks were stained by gun-smoke; the royal standard at the mainmast and the flags of St George which whipped from the fore- and mizzen-tops were in tatters. The rigging showed signs of makeshift repair, the bowsprit and mizzen mast had been splintered by shot, and the ship's longboat was missing. Although she was still seaworthy, *Victory* was in no condition to engage an enemy. Her shot-lockers, on which her whole fighting capacity depended, were empty.

Somewhere to leeward lay the huge Armada sent by King Philip II of Spain on 'the most important mission in the world, with the whole world watching': the conquest of England and its return to the Catholic Church.[1] Despite the longest and fiercest artillery battle which had ever taken place at sea, the Spanish fleet was still loose in the northern seas, its formidable order and discipline largely intact. Its ammunition stocks, though depleted, were not exhausted, while the massed companies of soldiers it carried still rendered the Armada invulnerable to boarding attack. Worst of all, the English no longer knew where it was, or what it might yet do.

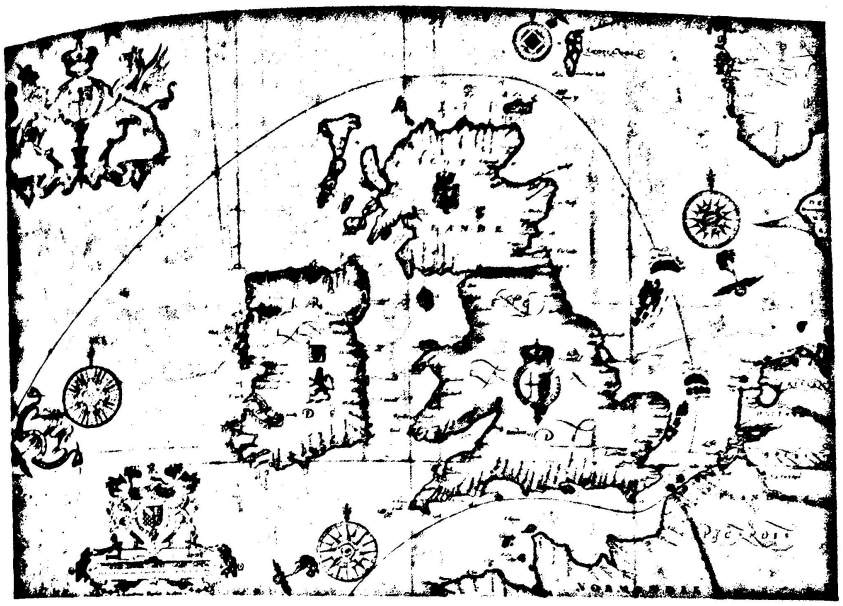
In *Victory*'s great cabin her captain, Sir John Hawkins, Treasurer of the Navy, scrawled a postscript to the urgent report he had just completed, apologizing for his poor handwriting: it was done, he explained, 'in haste and bad weather'. His dispatch, addressed to Sir Francis Walsingham, Queen Elizabeth's secretary of state, showed Hawkins to have been an extremely worried man. The Spanish fleet, he warned, was still:

Here, and very forcible, and must be waited upon with all our force, which is little enough. There should be an infinite quantity of powder and shot provided, and continually sent abroad; without the which great hazard may grow to our country; for this is the greatest and strongest combination, to my understanding, that ever was gathered in Christendom. Therefore I wish it, of all hands, to be mightily and diligently looked unto and cared for.[2]

Eight days later England's Lord Admiral, Charles Howard of Effingham, 'in haste and much occupied' aboard his flagship *Ark Royal*, still felt anxious and uncertain about the Armada's movements and intentions, but like Hawkins he had no doubt about its formidable strength. 'Some made little account of the Spanish force by sea,' he confided to Walsingham, 'but I do warrant you, all the world never saw such a force as theirs was.' Even the redoubtable Sir Francis Drake was by no means confident that the threat had passed. Although the Armada might have been driven back towards Spain, a powerful invasion army headed by one of the most determined and capable military commanders of the age still lay on the Flemish coast, poised to embark for England. From his flagship *Revenge*, Drake warned on 20 August that the queen's ministers should not doubt that Alexander Farnese, duke of Parma, 'being so great a soldier as he is ... will presently, if he may, undertake some great matter ... My poor opinion is that we should have a great eye unto him.'[3]

England's best-informed contemporary opinion thus did not underestimate the enormity of the threat posed by Philip's fleet – and yet, as quickly as it had come, that threat evaporated. The Armada had no further tricks up its sleeve: it struggled on between Orkney and Shetland and into the Atlantic in an effort to gain sufficient sea-room for a safe run southwards to the ports of Galicia and Biscay. But fortune did not favour it. The autumn gales of that portentous year – the Winds of God, as their Protestant detractors would have it – blew early and with unusual violence, driving many of the returning ships towards the western seaboards of Scotland and Ireland. A large number were wrecked, often in cataclysmic circumstances, and the survivors were hounded down with little mercy (Figure 1).

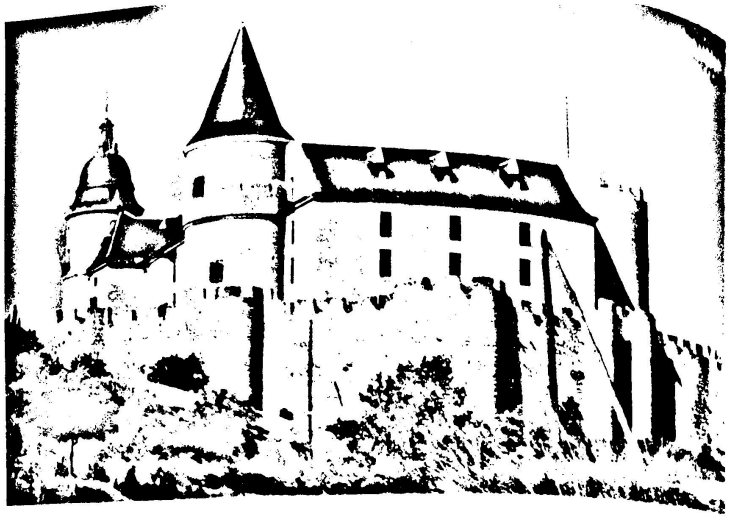
For the Spaniards the Armada campaign proved an unmitigated disaster brought about as much by the forces of nature as by the hand of their adversaries. The English and Dutch, in contrast, saw it as both an overwhelming victory and a clear demonstration of where divine sympathy lay. The anxious realities expressed by the English commanders in the campaign's immediate aftermath were quickly swamped, in the euphoria of deliverance, by a tide of uncritical and patriotic fervour that saw the events as an affirmation of Protestant England's inevitable superiority over her Catholic foes.



1. The route the Armada took around Britain and Ireland, including the locations of some shipwrecks. The scale is in English leagues. The compass roses show the wind directions at various stages of the journey. A hand-coloured engraving by Augustine Ryther of a chart by Robert Adams, made in 1590.

That fervour, and the misconceptions it generated, have dominated English perceptions of the campaign ever since. The Armada story acquired a perennial appeal as the heroic and triumphant episode in a long maritime, military, economic and ideological struggle between England and her rivals. On any reckoning it is a good yarn, and it has provided generations of historians with an abundance of material from which to spin it.

Serious studies began in the late nineteenth century with the publication of selections of documents from both Spanish and English archives, albeit often accompanied by patriotic commentaries. For almost a century afterwards, those who studied the Armada tended to wallow in the rich but unreplenished pond provided by their late Victorian progenitors, even though the published sources represented (as their editors were at pains to point out) no more than personal selections of the documents they considered most relevant in the light of late nineteenth-century historical perceptions. It is time to examine the original sources anew.



2. Simancas Castle, Spain. The Spanish monarchy began to deposit its central administrative records here in 1540. The archive, originally housed under the dome of the tower on the far left, still contains the majority of the official papers concerning the Armada. Colin Martin took this photo in 1966 when Geoffrey Parker was working in the search room (the lower windows in the centre). They first met seven years later as colleagues at the University of St Andrews.

On the Spanish side much of the primary evidence survives in the archives of Simancas (AGS) (Figure 2). The king's councils and secretaries of state and war handled a mass of reports, memoranda and letters concerning the 'Enterprise of England' (as Philip called it), and they later formed part of the series *Estado* and *Guerra y Marina*. They are relatively well known, though still greatly underexploited. Less familiar are the audited accounts concerning the men, munitions and provisions loaded aboard individual Armada ships, now in the series *Contaduría Mayor de Cuentas* and *Contaduría del Sueldo*. Some are extremely detailed, thanks to the obligation of each ship's clerk to 'record the powder, shot and match expended, noting down how much is used every day and for what reason, with what effect, and by whose order. Take particular note of the artillery pieces fired, and of their calibre and weight, and of the powder and shot consumed in firing them.'[4]

Beyond Simancas, the papers of the Armada's commander, the duke of Medina Sidonia, have survived almost intact, although now scattered between collections in England and the United States as well as in the ducal archive at Sanlúcar de Barrameda. They shed light on important issues concerning the conduct of the Spanish campaign. The Armada's deputy commander, Juan Martínez de Recalde, kept a detailed journal of his voyage and also preserved some of the letters he exchanged with Medina Sidonia and others during and just after the battles in the English Channel, revealing major differences of opinion over both strategy and tactics within the fleet's High Command. Others aboard the Armada also left personal testimonies in the form of narratives, diaries, letters and (for those taken prisoner) interrogations.

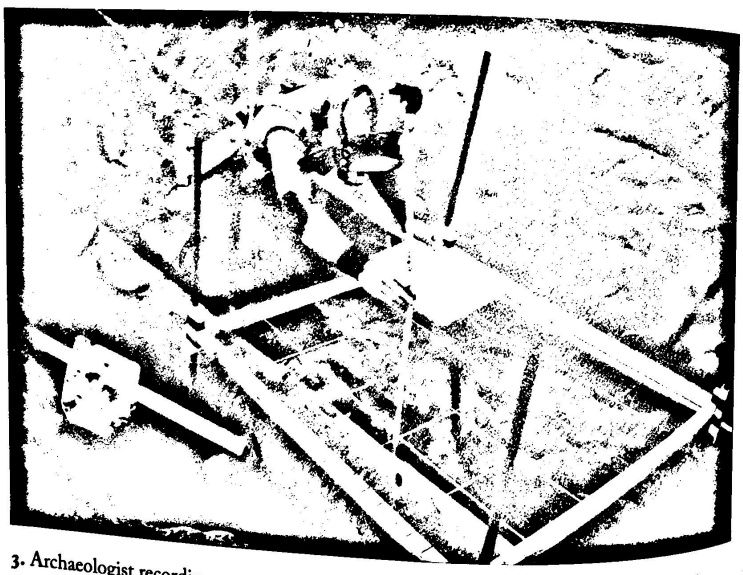
The surviving records of the Armada's English opponents are similar but less plentiful. Elizabeth's Privy Council and her secretary of state handled a mass of reports, memoranda and letters concerning the defence of England and Ireland. Most are preserved among the Registers of the Privy Council (a daily compilation of decisions taken by the executive branch of government on matters great and small) and the State Papers series in The National Archives (TNA) at Kew, with more in the manuscript collections of the British Library and elsewhere. The National Archives also hold three series of annual accounts regarding the navy: those submitted each year by the Treasurer of the Navy, with detail on the equipment and movements of the queen's ships and the wages of all who served on them; and by the Victualler of the Navy, recording the quantity and cost of all provisions supplied to keep those aboard the ships at their posts. The Ordnance Office also submitted separate accounts for munitions supplied each year 'for the sea service', but those for 1588 have largely disappeared. Only those for Drake's western squadron survive in the Plymouth Archives. Lord Admiral Howard seems to have been the only senior English officer in 1588 to have kept a journal of the campaign, but neither he nor his commanders left a substantial personal archive.

The same imbalance affects diplomatic dispatches. Ambassadors from twelve foreign governments resided at the Court of Spain in the 1580s, and each wrote at least one lengthy dispatch per month to his home government, filled with details of the Enterprise. They also secured and forwarded copies of official documents, even top-secret ones like the Armada's order of battle. Philip II maintained ambassadors in the larger states, and his correspondence with them (preserved in AGS *Estado*) also sheds light on his plans. In contrast Elizabeth maintained permanent diplomatic relations with only three states in the 1580s: France, Scotland and the Dutch Republic. The dispatches of her envoys abroad are in TNA State Papers; those of the French and Scottish diplomats at her Court in 1588 have apparently disappeared.

The surviving administrative records for Elizabeth's only ally, the Dutch Republic, are even more scarce. The Algemene Rijksarchief in The Hague contains

the correspondence of the central government with its English allies as well as with its own military and civilian personnel; the resolutions and correspondence of the States-General (the sovereign body); the minutes of the Council of State (charged with defence); and some records of the Admiralty of Holland. The Rijksarchief Zeeland in Middelburg contains both the correspondence of the provincial authorities with the States-General and the accounts of those who salvaged two large Armada wrecks in Dutch waters.

Over the past fifty years maritime archaeology has allowed us, quite literally, to go on board the ships themselves and examine them and their contents at first hand. In the terrible aftermath of the Armada more than thirty Spanish ships were lost off the western coasts of Scotland and Ireland; and the sites of eight have now been discovered and investigated. Between them they provide examples of several of the types of ship which sailed with the Armada: the Neapolitan galleass *Girona* off the coast of Antrim, Northern Ireland: the Basque-built *Santa María de la Rosa* in Blasket Sound off south-west Ireland; the Rostock-built *urca Gran Grifón* off Fair Isle, between Orkney and Shetland (Figure 3); the Venetian-built grain-carrier *Trinidad Valencera* in Kinnagoe Bay, County Donegal, Ireland. In 1985 the remains of three large Mediterranean cargo ships, *Santa María de Visón*, *Juliana* and *Lavia*, began to emerge in the surf off Streedagh Strand, County Sligo,



3. Archaeologist recording a gun on the site of the wreck of *Gran Grifón* off Fair Isle.

Ireland. Yet another ill-fated Mediterranean merchantman, *San Juan de Sicilia*, went down in Tobermory Bay, on the Isle of Mull in western Scotland, though her remains have been all but obliterated by more than three centuries of determined and destructive hunting for her elusive (because illusory) treasure.

Archaeological evidence from these Armada wrecks has revolutionized our understanding of the events this book seeks to chronicle and explain, particularly when viewed in concert with the wealth of documentary material available in archives and libraries around the world. To be sure, the broad outline of the Armada story remains the same: Philip II attempted to invade and conquer England but his plans miscarried, partly because of his own miscalculation and mismanagement, partly because of the superior defensive efforts of the English and their Dutch allies, and partly because of singularly adverse weather. But there is more to history than broad outlines. The evidence now available, both documentary and archaeological, allows us to follow each stage in the Armada story with greater certainty than before and, perhaps more importantly, to explain with greater confidence why events turned out as they did.

Instead of basing our narrative on the pseudo-patriotic jingoism and speculative theorizing which has characterized so many previous studies, we rely here on a wide corpus of information drawn from contemporary protagonists and from the physical remains of the wrecked ships. All the available evidence reinforces our belief that the Armada constituted a threat to England of overwhelming proportions, and confirms that the anxious concerns expressed by English naval commanders about the menace it posed were not misplaced. In perhaps only slightly different circumstances, the Enterprise of England might have become the crowning success of Philip's reign.

The conflict was the highlight, though not the last act, of a personal duel between two monarchs who knew and disliked each other (Figure 4). At the time no one could predict the outcome, and Spain should no more be denigrated for failing to achieve its objectives than England's deliverance should be ascribed to its innate superiority. All the protagonists demonstrated both formidable strengths and serious weaknesses in the conflict, and most emerged with honour. The story stands on its own terms and the only bygones to be forgotten are the myths.

The men who fought on both sides, in particular, deserve nothing less. As Sir John Keegan wrote in his classic study, *The Face of Battle*: 'What battles have in common is human: the behaviour of men struggling to reconcile their instinct for self-preservation, their sense of honour, and the achievement of some aim over which other men are ready to kill them. The study of battle is therefore always a study of fear and usually of courage.' This is especially true of naval warfare,

which is conducted almost exclusively by machines – and by the late sixteenth century the sailing warship was the most complex machine to be found anywhere. Nevertheless, the story of the men who lived, fought and often died in the ships of the Armada campaign 'is still the fundamental story to be related'. We therefore follow the lead of Rear-Admiral José Ignacio González-Aller Hierro, the driving force behind the magnificent multi-volume publication of Armada documents, *La batalla del Mar Océano*, and dedicate our efforts to those on both sides who fought and died for their country in 1588, 'far from their homes, anonymous heroes known only to God'.[5]

1

'Arise O Lord and Avenge Thy Cause'[1]

On Parade

Shortly after dawn on 25 April 1588, Don Agustín Mexía led seven companies of Spanish infantrymen, 1,250 soldiers, onto the broad plaza beside the River Tagus at Lisbon and lined them up as an honour-guard facing the Ribeira Palace, the seat of Portugal's kings (Figure 6).

Eight years before, Philip II of Spain had claimed the throne of Portugal on the death of the last ruler from the native Avis dynasty, unleashing an army led by his foremost general, the duke of Alba, and a fleet commanded by his foremost admiral, the marquis of Santa Cruz. Backed by skilful logistical planning, the invaders joined forces and advanced to the walls of Lisbon where they routed the troops mobilized by another claimant to the Portuguese throne, Dom Antonio. Forces led by Spanish grandees, including the duke of Medina Sidonia, soon overcame all opposition in the peninsula and in April 1581 Philip II of Spain was crowned Philip I of Portugal. Only the Azores archipelago in the mid-Atlantic, a thousand miles west of Lisbon, held out for Dom Antonio.

In 1582 Santa Cruz, who had extensive experience of amphibious warfare in the Mediterranean, organized a battle fleet ('armada' in Spanish) in Lisbon's Tagus estuary, and led it forth to impose Spanish control on the Azores. In an engagement in July off the largest island, São Miguel, Santa Cruz routed the fleet raised by Dom Antonio and executed all those captured. He returned in triumph to Lisbon, where the king received him in person. Only Terceira island continued to defy him, and the following summer Santa Cruz led an even larger armada including galleys and troop-transports from Lisbon and directed a successful amphibious landing.

After another round of executions, and the brutal sack of captured communities, all resistance collapsed and Santa Cruz again returned in triumph to Lisbon.

By then King Philip had returned to Spain where he turned his attention to creating an even larger armada, mobilizing ships, men, munitions and provisions from his dominions in Europe and America, and from his allies, until by 1587 he had assembled a task force of 30,000 men and 130 ships in the Tagus estuary. He instructed Santa Cruz to conquer England and restore its obedience to the pope: a venture known in Catholic circles as the 'Enterprise of England'.

To achieve these goals Philip had devised an ambitious strategy. The Armada would adopt a defensive formation as it advanced up the English Channel, relying on tight sailing discipline and the numerous soldiers aboard to fend off opposition until the fleet approached the ports of the Spanish Netherlands, where his nephew the duke of Parma had orders to assemble 27,000 troops and embark them on a flotilla of small ships. The two forces would then 'join hands' (the king's phrase) and cross the Narrow Seas together to establish a beachhead at Margate in north-east Kent. There the Armada would offload the siege-guns, draught animals, munitions and supporting services it had brought from Lisbon, and also 6,000 of its own troops to reinforce Parma's men. The invading army would then advance rapidly towards London, supported by the fleet in the Thames. With the support of its siege-train it would neutralize England's antiquated and weakly garrisoned defences, seize the capital, and either capture or kill Queen Elizabeth and her leading ministers.

Parma's soldiers were reckoned the best in the world and putting their boots on English soil offered Philip the most promising pathway to success – but boots on Spanish decks were needed to get them there. The seven companies of infantrymen drawn up outside Lisbon's Ribeira Palace were 'the best-looking and best-armed men that could be found' among the five Spanish *tercios* (regiments) embarked aboard the Armada (Figure 7). Appearances were deceptive, however. Officers and men were chosen because of their looks, not their unit cohesion, to serve as an honour-guard for the parade and the ensuing standard-blessing ceremony. They had come ashore the previous evening, while their comrades remained locked down on the ships. Guards posted ashore had orders to capture and execute any deserters (the fate of several previous fugitives).

On the stroke of 6 a.m. a procession emerged from the palace led by Philip's viceroy of Portugal, his nephew Cardinal Archduke Albert, who also served as the kingdom's papal legate and chief Inquisitor. Around his neck hung the emblem of the Golden Fleece, Spain's most prestigious order of chivalry, of which Philip was Grand Master and whose knights he addressed as *primo*: 'cousin'. At the viceroy's right hand rode a short, heavily built bearded man of thirty-nine, who also wore

7. Spanish infantry marching. Men with muskets and arquebuses lead with pikemen behind. Part of a frieze made of tiles commissioned in the 1580s to celebrate the victories of the marquis of Santa Cruz.

the distinctive Golden Fleece: Don Alonso Pérez de Guzmán el Bueno, twelfth lord of Sanlúcar de Barrameda, ninth count of Niebla and seventh duke of Medina Sidonia, who the previous evening had taken the oath to serve faithfully as Philip's Captain-General of the Ocean Sea, an office vacated by the death of Santa Cruz two months before. Medina Sidonia had sought to decline this honour, but Philip insisted. Now the reluctant duke was honour-bound to do his best in an enterprise he had come to believe was ill-judged and unlikely to succeed.

Next in the procession came Don Alonso Martínez de Leyva, aged thirty-seven, whom the king had appointed to lead the Armada's troops after they landed in England and also (though he probably did not know it) to take command of the Armada should Medina Sidonia fall. Don Alonso, resplendent in a suit of gilded armour presented by the king, had served with distinction in Italy, the Netherlands and both Azores campaigns; and early in 1588 Philip had briefed him in person on his operational duties.[4] At his side marched his brother-in-law, Don Francisco de Bobadilla: at fifty the Armada's most experienced military commander, with a distinguished record of active service in Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal, culminating in his appointment as overall infantry commander on the Terceira campaign five years before. Bobadilla also had good connections at Court, having grown up in the household of one of the king's principal advisers. Then came the *maestres de campo* (colonels) of the five Spanish infantry *tercios* embarked on the fleet, led by Don Alonso de Luzón of the *tercio* of Naples, who sported a moustache so luxurious that it attracted comment when the English captured him a few months later; and

Don Diego Pimentel of the *tercio* of Sicily. These two distinguished officers had led their troops from Spanish Italy to Lisbon the previous year. Nicolás de Isla was in command of the regiment which normally sailed on the guardships of the transatlantic convoys carrying the treasure that was the life-blood of the Spanish Empire. Don Francisco de Toledo and Mexía himself commanded the two *tercios* of volunteers raised in different parts of Spain specifically for service on the Armada. The reserve companies (*compañias sueltas*) had no colonel.

Each of the seven most senior infantry officers also commanded a fighting vessel in the Armada; six came from noble families, and five were knights in one of Spain's orders of chivalry. Some of the *aventureros* (gentlemen volunteers) and *entretenidos* (staff officers) who took part in the procession were also knights. Foremost among them marched Don Antonio Luis de Leyva (a distant cousin of Don Alonso), prince of Ascoli, whom many believed to be (in the words of Elizabeth's chief minister, Lord Burghley) 'the king of Spain's bastard': offspring of a supposed liaison between Philip and a lady of the Court.[3]

After the viceroy and the duke had completed their inspection, the parade marched off to the sound of fife and drum to Lisbon's great cathedral. Few townspeople lined the streets, and the Portuguese aristocracy were pointedly absent – Spain's recent conquest still rankled – but protocols had to be observed and the archbishop of Lisbon celebrated Mass and pronounced a general benediction on the Enterprise of England. Other native well-wishers included Sor María de la Visitación, a noblewoman sent to a nunnery as a child, who in 1584 had begun to display the stigmata of Christ's wounds. She also claimed to have experienced visions in which Christ and selected saints spoke to her. Many believed that her prayers had cured the sick and averted shipwrecks, and she received visitors and letters from far and wide seeking her intervention. Fray Luis de Granada, author of the best-selling *Book of Prayer and Meditation* and a celebrated preacher whose sermons had impressed the king during his stay in Lisbon ('even though he is very old and has no teeth'), became convinced that Sor María was a saint and composed a flattering biography that listed her 'miracles'. The viceroy asked her to bless the Armada and she graciously obliged.[4]

On 25 April the Armada's damask battle standard, so heavy that it took two men to lift, was laid on the cathedral altar and blessed. Its design affirmed the venture's strong religious overtones: images of a crucified Christ and the Virgin Mary flanked Philip's coat of arms, with the inscription *Exsurge Deus et vindica causam tuam*: 'Arise O Lord and Avenge Thy Cause'. The ships in the estuary and the soldiers drawn up outside fired three rounds in salute, and the garrison of Lisbon Castle replied.

After Mass the archbishop and clergy of the city processed through the streets towards the palace, followed by Albert and the senior officers. Medina

Sidonia's cousin Don Luis de Córdoba, mounted on a white charger, bore the now-consecrated banner aloft. They paused at a nearby Dominican convent where the duke (with some assistance) draped the unwieldy standard over the altar and held one of its tassels to mark the consecration of his own person to the cause it signified.

Finally the duke and viceroy stood on the steps of the palace while the honour-guard fired another volley, and those holding colours and pikes lowered them in salute. The senior officers then retired for a well-earned repast, while the soldiers were herded back to the ships. They would not leave Lisbon for more than a month, or disembark for more than two. The survivors would not return to Spain for five months or more. Almost half would not return at all.

The Participants: Soldiers

A variety of sources, from documents in archives and libraries to artefacts recovered from Armada wrecks, provide details about the soldiers aboard the fleet. Only a few were born outside Spain. In February 1588 a Moroccan magistrate who had fled to Portugal and converted to Christianity offered to raise seventy 'men of his nation' to 'serve God and His Majesty' on the Armada, and asked permission to embark on smaller ships 'because they will be the first to land'. Medina Sidonia accepted, but with reservations: the new recruits, known as Moriscos (converts to Christianity from Islam) 'may not have colours or drums or other insignia', and they would receive a firearm but no salary.[5] In addition 'some Africans and people of mixed race [*negros y mulatos*]' sailed with the fleet – but according to one eyewitness 'very few of them survived because of the extreme cold' on the voyage. We know the fate of only two of the Africans: one was still alive when his ship ran aground on the Devon coast on the way back to Spain but died shortly after coming ashore; the other was thrown into the air when the ship on which he sailed exploded just after she returned to her home port. Miraculously he survived.[6]

Fearing that his ships had too few soldiers to achieve the king's goals, a month before the parade Medina Sidonia had issued a call for Portuguese volunteers, but only two gentlemen agreed to lead them (Albert 'spoke to others, but they refused'), and even they demanded higher wages and refused to serve on the same ship. Eventually, almost 2,000 local men embarked but Philip remained suspicious, insisting that 'the Portuguese troops should remain aboard the ships at all times, because I hear they serve better at sea than ashore. Those who land' in England 'must in all cases be the best and most experienced soldiers.'[7]

Who, then, were the 'most experienced soldiers'? They included 1,400 men drawn from the Spanish garrisons of Sicily, commanded by Pimentel (a veteran of the conquest of Portugal in 1580). They had sailed from Sicily to Cadiz and marched overland to Lisbon, arriving just in time to sail with Santa Cruz in July 1587 to the Azores to meet and escort home the annual treasure-fleet from the Americas. Four other contingents of infantry sailed with the marquis: 1,700 men drawn from the Spanish garrisons in Portugal; 1,500 who had served on the transatlantic guardships; 500 aboard a squadron from Vizcaya in northern Spain; and 2,500 raised by the cities and nobles of Andalucia. These men may have lacked combat experience but their voyage to the Azores and back, which lasted three months and covered 2,000 miles, had at least familiarized them with naval service in Atlantic waters. Six infantry companies that arrived at Lisbon in April 1588 also had naval experience. The company of Patricio Antolínez, raised in Burgos, had embarked on the transatlantic guardships at Sanlúcar in April 1586, spent the winter in Cartagena de Indias (now in Colombia), and returned in September 1587. It then sailed to Lisbon, where many were sent to reinforce other ships. Antolínez and his men boarded the *urca Gran Grifón*.[8]

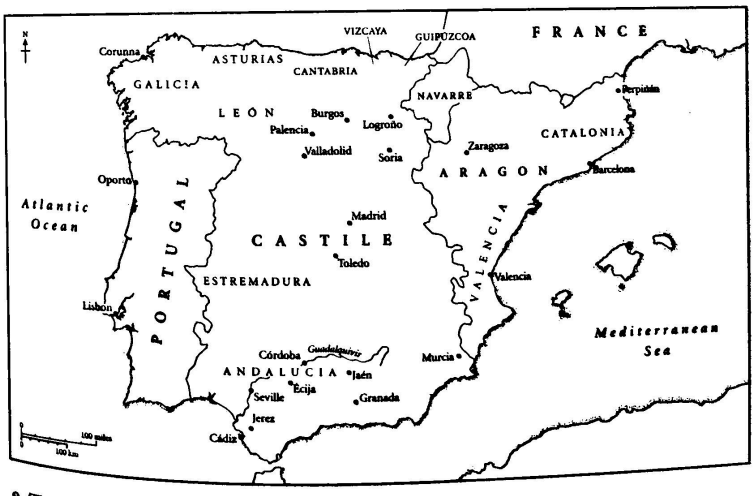
The 'most experienced soldiers' aboard the Armada also included 1,600 men drawn from the Spanish garrisons in Naples commanded by Alonso de Luzón. Like the *tercio* created from the Spanish garrisons in northern Portugal and Galicia commanded by Toledo, they arrived in Lisbon too late to take part in the Azores operation, but all were familiar with military life, and some had been under fire. Thus Francisco Ruiz Matute had enlisted in a Spanish infantry company in 1567 and fought on Philip's Mediterranean galley-fleet, participating in the great naval victory of Lepanto in 1571 before returning to Naples. He became a company captain just before his *tercio* set sail for Lisbon, where he embarked on the ill-fated *Santa María de la Rosa*. Francisco Blanco, another veteran from the *tercio* of Naples, had served in the conquest of Portugal and the Azores, and then fought in the Netherlands until 1586 before fleeing to Naples, where he changed his name to Juan Ortega before enlisting in Luzón's *tercio*. Together they travelled to Lisbon, where they embarked on the equally ill-fated *Trinidad Valencera*.[9]

Perhaps 10,000 soldiers aboard the Armada could thus claim previous military or naval experience. The rest were raw recruits: the 2,000 Portuguese and Morisco volunteers; 2,500 more raised by the cities and nobles of Andalucia; 1,500 raised by the cities and nobles of Extremadura; and 1,500 from elsewhere in Castile. Instead of joining one of the *tercios*, these soldiers joined the reserves. The companies from Extremadura arrived so late that Medina Sidonia embarked them 'directly from the barges' that carried them across the Tagus, for fear they might desert if allowed to

land. They received the weapons they would be expected to use in combat only after coming aboard, and powder and ball 'so that they could train, and have something in reserve for the expected combat', only after two weeks at sea.[10]

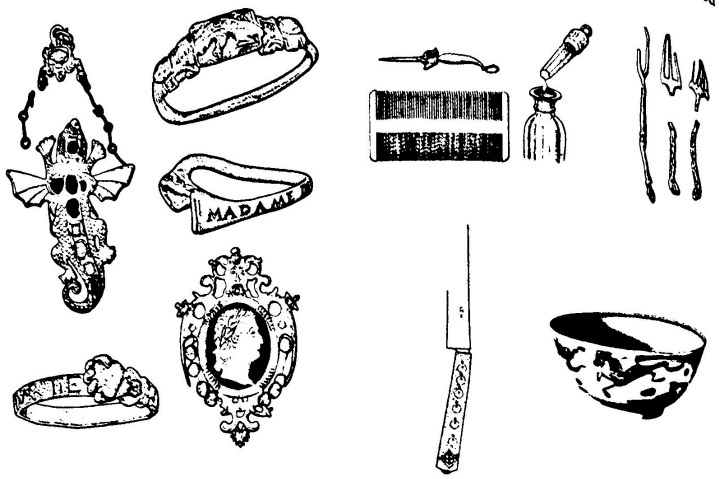
A disproportionate number of the other soldiers aboard the Armada came from Andalucia, both because the king had issued patents to raise a total of 5,000 men there for service on the fleet, and because almost all the troops already serving on the transatlantic guardships also came from the towns and villages of the Guadalquivir valley (Figure 8). Many came from the same place and continued to serve together, rather like the 'chums platoons' of the British Army in the First World War. Thus sixty-four Armada survivors ransomed in England in 1590 came from the small town of Écija, between Seville and Córdoba, because they had enlisted together when Captain Alonso de Zayas recruited a company there. Like him, they boarded *Nuestra Señora del Rosario*; and like him, they fell prisoner to the English when the ship surrendered after her first day in combat.

Each *tercio* usually comprised twelve companies. Within each company, soldiers belonged to a *camarada* – a group of six to eight men who shared a tent or billet, and cooked and ate together. This is an optimum bonding number: large enough for individuals to be mutually supportive, yet not numerous enough to encourage factions. An army's cohesion and strength depends on the interpersonal loyalty and support within these tight-knit groups.



8. The provinces of Spain.

The fleet also included more than 500 *aventureros* and *entretenidos*, who brought with them not only some 600 'retainers able to fight' but also jewellery, including (in some cases) gold chains. These could be up to fifteen feet long, worn in loops. They were not merely decorative: links were pinched together rather than joined



9. Items of gold jewellery recovered from the wreck of *Girona*. Top left, a gold pendant in the form of a salamander, studded with rubies, while a ring (top right) bearing the same mythical emblem (supposedly an antidote to fire) perhaps belonged to the same individual. Bottom left, a lover's ring which even after four centuries beneath the sea brings a lump to the throat. It was given by his wife or sweetheart and depicts an unclasped girdle with a hand holding a heart with this timeless inscription: NO TENGO MAS QUE DARTE – 'I have nothing more to give you'. Centre right, Tomás Perrenot, the nephew and heir of Cardinal Granvelle (for many years Philip II's chief minister), wore a ring inscribed 'Madame de Champagney 1524' which had belonged to his grandmother Nicole Bonvalot. He perished with Leyva when *Girona* went down. Bottom right, Cameo with the head of one of the twelve Caesars (the other eleven were also found). Each was of lapis lazuli framed with gold embellished with pearls, and would have been linked as a necklace.

10. Other luxury items found on Armada wrecks include: a gold combination toothpick and ear-scoop (*Girona*); a silver scent bottle and glass dropper (*Girona*); and a nit comb (*Trinidad Valencera*). Top right, three silver forks of different designs, very early examples, from the wreck of *Girona*, which was crowded with survivors from earlier wrecks on the Irish coast. Centre, knife with a steel blade decorated with a fish symbol; the handle is of bone, the two sides held together with decorative copper-alloy rivets (*Trinidad Valencera*). Bottom right, Ming-dynasty export-quality porcelain bowl, also from *Trinidad Valencera*.

so that lengths could be detached to make payments – an early form of traveller's cheque. When *Trinidad Valencera* foundered off the Irish coast, a survivor estimated that 'the soldiers and wild people' relieved them of 'money, gold buttons, rapiers and apparel to the value of 7,300 ducats or there about' and 'money, plate and jewels' worth 1,200 ducats (Figure 9).[11] The senior commanders, like their retainers, also brought extra luxuries with them, including fine clothes and dinner services for use when they arrived in London (Figure 10).[12]

Many men aboard the Armada left wives and sweethearts behind. Only sixty-four women received permission to embark with their husbands on the *urcas Santiago* and *El Gato* (known in the fleet as 'the ships of the women'), presumably to carry out ancillary tasks as the army advanced into England. Many soldiers were probably unmarried because they were young – sometimes very young. Of 500 soldiers recruited for service on the Armada in summer 1587, ninety were teenagers and 320 were aged between twenty and twenty-five. Of almost 400 soldiers imprisoned in England and ransomed in 1590, forty-eight had enlisted before they turned eighteen and almost all the rest were under thirty. Of 133 other Armada survivors later integrated into the Spanish army fighting in the Netherlands, ten had enlisted as teenagers and most of the rest in their early twenties.[13]

The service records of the last group of survivors offer a unique insight into the experience of individual soldiers aboard the fleet, because the army's accountants listed everything supplied to each man so that it could be deducted later from his wages. The balance sheet is revealing. The soldiers who boarded the transatlantic guardships in March 1586 earned some 100 escudos over the next two years and had received almost all of it in money and goods (clothes, weapons, rations and so on) by the time they set sail for England. Likewise, Luzón's veterans received their wage arrears in full when they left Naples in May 1587 and earned a further 42 escudos by the time they sailed from Lisbon one year later, of which they had already received 41 escudos in money and goods.[14]

These figures reflect both the efficiency of Spain's military administration and Philip's ability to transfer large consignments of American treasure to Lisbon. Just before the parade 500,000 escudos in gold arrived from Seville, half of which Medina Sidonia used to issue two months' wages to each man. He divided the rest between the five most powerful ships in the fleet, ready for disbursement as soon as the Armada reached England: his flagship *San Martín* (Portugal), *Santa Ana* (Vizcaya), *Santa Ana* (Guipúzcoa), *San Salvador* (Guipúzcoa) and *Rosario* (Andalucia).

Perhaps this largesse raised collective morale, because as they boarded their ships some soldiers sang a popular ballad:

My brother Bart
For England departs
To kill Drake
And capture the queen.

When he returns from the wars
He must bring back in chains
A little Lutheran for me
And a Lutheran girl for my granny.[15]

The Participants: Mariners

Most of the soldiers had spent the winter months billeted ashore, but most of the seamen had not, and (no doubt because of their close confinement) diseases raged through the ships. Typhus carried off the marquis of Santa Cruz in February 1588; and of 700 Basque seamen who joined the Armada and perished before it returned, almost half died before the fleet even departed. These seamen from Spain's north coast – one of the few contingents of the 7,000 aboard the Armada for whom we have details – differed from the soldiers in two respects. First, many were married: together, they left behind almost 350 widows and some 700 orphans. Second, they were almost all experienced. Many had sailed to the Azores and back the previous year, and before that had served an apprenticeship as *grumetes*, learning how to climb the rigging and work the sails, man the pumps, tie knots, crew the ship's boat, and follow orders. As in all sailing ships it was a hard life. In the chilling phrase of the *Naval Instructions* published by Judge Diego García de Palacio in 1587: 'The lash will soon teach those who do not already know their way round a ship.'[16]

Like the soldiers, many seamen aboard the Armada came from the same place – 150 of the Basque seamen lived in San Sebastián and the neighbouring port of Pasajes (Pasaia) – and some came from the same family. Martín de Villafranca from San Sebastián, owner and master of *Santa María de la Rosa*, was one of those who died in Lisbon; his son of the same name succeeded him and perished 'when the ship and everyone aboard foundered on the coast of Ireland'. Three Iriarte brothers from the small port of Zumaya all died on the campaign, albeit on different ships: Martín, a gunner; Lazaro, a carpenter; and Balthasar, a sailor. Although 'too young to marry', the three left their grieving parents 'in great poverty'.[17]

Personal details for one other group of Armada mariners survive: thirty captured seamen ransomed from English prisons in 1590. Many were in their thirties,

and almost all were described as having a 'good physique' (*buen cuerpo*) – a phrase conspicuously absent from the list of soldiers ransomed at the same time. Again in contrast to the soldiers, these mariners and the eleven ransomed *grumetes* came from all over Europe: from the Baltic, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and the Adriatic, as well as from Spain's Atlantic ports. This variety is hardly surprising, because the Armada included ships from all those locations, embargoed on Philip's orders along with their crews. Perhaps half the 7,000 seamen aboard the Spanish Armada did not come from Spain.[18]

Ten Generals for Ten Squadrons

The Armada left Lisbon organized in ten squadrons, each commanded by a Spanish 'general': nine from Castile and one from Catalonia.

Medina Sidonia, born at Sanlúcar de Barrameda and in command of the squadron of Portugal as well as of the whole Armada, was Spain's richest grandee. He governed more than 50,000 vassals, and a register of the estates and jurisdictions he inherited covered 400 folio pages. In 1579 the duke had organized the defence of Andalucia against a possible attack from Morocco, working closely with the galley squadron commanded by Santa Cruz, and the two also cooperated closely the following year in reducing the ports of southern Portugal to Philip's obedience. In 1581 the king ordered Medina Sidonia to lead an amphibious attack on Morocco, but he changed his mind and diverted the naval assets assembled in Andalucia to Lisbon for the Azores campaign. Unfortunately, two of the galleys prepared by the duke sank in Cadiz Bay in January 1582, and Santa Cruz sent a crushing reproach: 'I implore your lordship not to order galleys to sail at this time of year, because even if they are fully provisioned they may be lost.' Medina Sidonia objected to the rude tone and forwarded the letter to Philip, demanding a commission of inquiry to establish whether he had been at fault (if so, he offered to pay for the damage). This irritated the king. 'As if we did not have enough difficulties and problems, now I have this package from the duke of Medina Sidonia,' he scribbled angrily to his private secretary and chaplain, Mateo Vázquez. 'It's stupid to have the duke and the marquis at odds like this', especially since 'I don't think the marquis's letter is as bad as the duke claims'. Philip nevertheless instructed Vázquez to rebuke Santa Cruz, reminding him 'how much His Majesty esteems the duke, both for who he is and for all he does in the king's service'. So 'let there be no differences, but rather complete conformity between you'. The rebuke worked. In 1587 Medina Sidonia supervised the dispatch

of a huge fleet of reinforcements from Andalucia to join Santa Cruz in Lisbon. Not one ship was lost.[19]

Juan Gómez de Medina, from Cadiz, had accompanied Santa Cruz to the Azores in 1582 and served as vice-admiral of several transatlantic convoys. The central government rated him 'a soldier as well as a sailor' and in January 1588 appointed him general of the squadron of *urcas*: large merchantmen from northern Europe embargoed in the ports of Andalucia the previous year.[20]

Six other squadron commanders came from Spain's northern port cities. Juan Martínez de Recalde (Vizcaya), from Bilbao, was the son and grandson of seafarers who had served the Crown. Now in his mid-forties, he had commanded both transatlantic fleets and naval flotillas in the mid-Atlantic. In addition, as he reminded the king, 'I can truly say that Your Majesty has no subject of my rank with more experience, or who has sailed more often' in the seas around England, Ireland and the Netherlands. In 1572 Recalde had assembled and commanded a fleet sailing from Spain to the Netherlands, where he led his ships into battle against the Dutch rebels. Three years later he led a second fleet on the same route, and when storms forced him into the Solent he landed briefly at Southampton. In 1580 he transported an expeditionary force from Spain to Smerwick in south-west Ireland, gaining local nautical knowledge which would later save several Armada ships, including his own. He possessed one more asset: he had married the sister of Don Juan de Idiáquez, Philip's principal secretary of state, which gave Recalde valuable contacts at Court and a direct channel to the king. In March 1588, at Medina Sidonia's request, Philip appointed Recalde *almirante general* (deputy commander) of the Armada, 'because besides being a fine mariner he is a very good soldier'.[21]

Martín de Bertendona, aged fifty-eight and also from Bilbao, had an equally distinguished record. In 1554 he had sailed with the fleet which took Philip from Spain to Southampton for his marriage to Queen Mary Tudor, and in 1570 he commanded the fleet which brought Philip's fourth wife, Anna of Austria, from the Netherlands to Spain. For part of that voyage English warships commanded by Charles Howard and William Winter escorted his fleet: he would meet both officers and their ships again in the Armada battles. Bertendona had also fought the Dutch rebels alongside Recalde in the 1570s and commanded a squadron during the Azores campaigns of 1582 and 1583. In January 1588 Philip appointed him general of the Levant squadron, composed of large Mediterranean merchantmen.

Miguel de Oquendo from San Sebastián, in his mid-sixties, matched Recalde and Bertendona in naval experience. He too had played a prominent role in both Azores campaigns under Santa Cruz, and during the Armada battles some said he

handled his flagship 'like a lancer' – an extravagant simile, perhaps, for his lumbering 1,200-ton *Santa Ana*, though not for his personal panache. Like Recalde, Oquendo enjoyed good connections at Court: when in May 1586 Philip decided to create a fleet from Guipúzcoa under Oquendo's command, he granted a personal audience to brief him – the only senior commander apart from Leyva to be so honoured. Oquendo was also wealthy despite his humble origins. He owned two large ships (both sailed with the Armada), considerable cash reserves and two slaves.[22]

Agustín de Ojeda, born in adjacent Fuenterrabía, had twenty-five years of naval expertise, including service on the transatlantic convoys, and on both Azores campaigns, when in 1587 Santa Cruz awarded him a handsome salary as a staff officer 'to serve near our person'. Medina Sidonia kept Ojeda on the flagship, giving him joint command over all the seamen aboard until in June 1588 he appointed him to replace the deceased general of the squadron of *pataches* and *zabras* (small, fast sailing ships embargoed in the Basque ports).

Don Pedro de Valdés, in his mid-fifties, came from the port of Gijón in Asturias and in 1565 had commanded the troops aboard a task force sent to destroy all French settlements in Florida. A decade later he joined Recalde's fleet sailing to the Netherlands, taking refuge from storms in Dartmouth on the way. In 1580 he commanded the squadron which captured Oporto for King Philip, but the next year catastrophe struck: sent to clear the seas around the Azores of opponents, Don Pedro made a rash attempt to capture Terceira and had to withdraw after suffering heavy casualties. He was court-martialled on his return and sent to prison, but in 1587 he sailed to the Azores as an *entretenido* on Santa Cruz's flagship. On his return Philip appointed him general of the Andalusian squadron, made up of large merchantmen embargoed by the Crown. Like Oquendo, he was wealthy: witness the handsome Renaissance-style Valdés Palace which stills stands in Gijón.[23]

Don Pedro's cousin Diego Flores de Valdés, also from Gijón and (like Oquendo) over sixty, had a similarly mixed record of command. His career began auspiciously: he had accompanied Philip on his journey from Spain to Southampton in 1554 and commanded the ship which brought him back from the Netherlands to Spain five years later. He was second-in-command of the expeditionary force sent to Florida in 1565, and subsequently led at least eight convoys safely to and from North America. This record led to his appointment in 1581 to command a fleet sent to clear English interlopers from the South Atlantic, but in this he failed spectacularly: he lost all but eight of his twenty-three ships and the English escaped. Nevertheless, when in February 1588 Philip decided to divert to Lisbon another flotilla of guardships assembled for a transatlantic crossing, he appointed Flores as its general. It reached Lisbon on 28 April and became the squadron of Castile.[24]

Of the other two squadron generals, Diego de Medrano, born in Soria around 1545, had fought in the Mediterranean for twenty years before Santa Cruz appointed him to command the galleys which played a crucial role at Terceira in 1583. Medrano and his galleys also accompanied the marquis on the Azores expedition four years later. Don Hugo de Moncada, born in Barcelona in 1557, was the youngest of the generals. He began his military service at age fourteen, rising to command a galleass in 1585 in which he sailed from Naples to Lisbon two years later. In February 1588 Philip appointed him general of the galleass squadron.

It is worth pausing to admire the collective experience of these senior naval officers. Oquendo, Recalde, Don Pedro de Valdés, Bertendona, Medrano and Ojeda – like three senior army officers (Bobadilla, Leyva and Pimentel) – had all sailed with Santa Cruz to conquer the Azores and come under fire. The first four were also familiar with northern European waters; Recalde, Bertendona and Diego Flores had even sailed up the Solent and landed at Southampton. Oquendo, Recalde and Don Pedro, like Diego Flores and Gómez de Medina, had commanded fleets.

Although Medina Sidonia had done none of these things, he regularly summoned the generals to his flagship and took advantage of their wisdom. Perhaps his willingness to learn reflected his education. Pedro de Medina, a noted humanist and author of books on navigation and history, had taught him to converse in Latin as well as Spanish, and imparted a knowledge of history along with an interest in current affairs. Leyva, too, had received a fine education. In his last known letter, as he faced the bitterness of defeat in August 1588, he invited his colleague Recalde to recite 'A poem written by Fray Luis de León, the great scholar, when his jealous rivals had him imprisoned by the Inquisition. When he regained his freedom, he wrote down this poem that I am sending to you now, because we need the temperament of a poet.' Little is known of the education of the other generals, but at his death Oquendo owned a small library; and Recalde knew enough history to compare Leyva's bravery under fire with that of El Cid Campeador, Spain's national hero.[25]

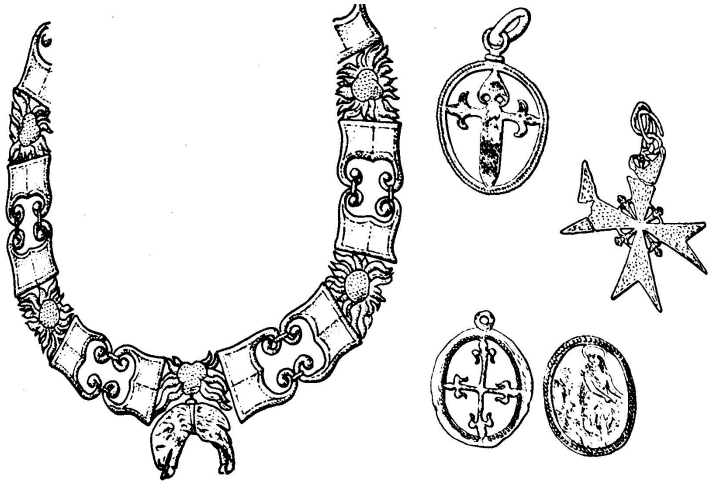
Men Behaving Badly

Nevertheless, like all human beings, the Armada's senior officers had their flaws. In February 1588 the king's special representative in Lisbon exploded with indignation that other members of the High Command treated Recalde with disdain, despite the fact that 'he is without doubt the most competent and experienced man here; and as God is my witness, he suffers a great wrong in not having a seat on the Council of War. Is it his fault that his colleagues resent him [because of his low birth]'? Shortly afterwards, when Don Pedro de Valdés disagreed with his colleagues on tactics, Medina Sidonia duly relayed his dissent to the king but spitefully added: 'Perhaps he does not remember what happened to him in Terceira, at great cost to Your Majesty.'[26] Don Pedro's cousin Diego Flores de Valdés also attracted a fair degree of spite. On hearing of his selection as commander of the South Atlantic fleet in 1581, a rival observed that 'although it is certain that His Majesty likes the general [Flores], those who know him definitely do not'. Seven years later, on learning that Flores would command the squadron of Castile, a survivor of the South Atlantic expedition urged the king to 'appoint someone with more courage, one not so timid and risk-averse to fighting even when he holds the advantage, as we saw most recently in the fleet sent by Your Majesty to the Strait of Magellan'.[27]

Some of the fleet's commanders fell short of the standards expected of a Spanish gentleman: a pedigree untainted by illegitimacy, Jewish blood, heresy, or having worked for a living. Even Medina Sidonia did not meet all these criteria, because he was descended from the illegitimate daughter of an archbishop who was himself illegitimate. Gómez de Medina was 'descended from Jewish converts, and the Inquisition of Seville had burned or condemned one of his grandfathers': his promotion to squadron commander only went through because the king's naval advisers 'did not have time to ask the Inquisitors of Seville to provide details'. Both Oquendo and Don Juan de Acuña Vela, Spain's Captain-General of Artillery, had been summoned to appear before their local Inquisition on suspicion of abetting heresy.[28]

The murky past of several other Armada commanders came to light through the complex process required to obtain a knighthood in one of Spain's Orders of Chivalry (Figure 11). As Grand Master of each Order, Philip alone could make a nomination; but before it could take effect, his Council of the Orders sent investigators to the residence of each nominee to interview people – often dozens of people – with knowledge of their religious and personal background. The investigators, one a friar and the other a knight of the Order, asked a set of questions designed to determine whether the nominee was of 'pure blood [*limpieza de sangre*]'. Those who failed this test only received a knighthood if the king secured a papal dispensation to disregard the 'stains [*tachas*]' on their record.

The Armada's senior officers had accumulated a surprising number of 'stains'. Don Pedro de Valdés's knighthood went on hold after investigators found that two of his grandparents were the offspring of fornicating priests, and 'the whole world knows it [*todo el mundo lo sabe*]'. In addition, some said his father had sold vegetables ('albeit home-grown, not the produce of others'). Although the investigators



11. The insignia of Spanish knightly orders. Left: the Golden Fleece, on a golden chain (reconstruction drawing). Members of this Order associated with the Armada included Parma and Medina Sidonia. Top right: Cross of a Knight of Santiago (Don Pedro de Valdés, Diego Flores, Oquendo and a score of others aboard the Armada held this honour). Middle right: Cross of a Knight of St John of Malta. Below right: Cross of a knight of Alcántara (front and back) perhaps belonging to Don Alonso de Leyva, a Knight Commander of the Order (all from the wreck of *Girona*).

suspected this was just a slur spread by Don Pedro's 'enemies in the town and on the town council', 'the whole world' also knew that no sooner had Valdés got his knighthood than his father Don Juan had Don Pedro's wife murdered on suspicion of adultery, and that royal officials then arrested, tried and executed Don Juan.[29]

Miguel de Oquendo, too, faced determined local enemies. In 1562 the king had granted his petition to carry 'offensive and defensive weapons' at all times, because 'some people wish you harm, and you fear that they might injure or kill you'. Twenty years later, now a magistrate in San Sebastián, Oquendo browbeat his colleagues into approving funds for the squadron the king had asked him to raise and lead to the Azores, which meant that 'many people in this town hate him'. His enemies had a field day when the Council's investigators arrived later that year to collect testimony for Oquendo's knighthood. Witnesses asserted that his father had 'made ropes with his own hands', and that Miguel not only bought and sold goods but also maintained a factor in Cadiz to handle his merchandise.

In October 1583, after returning victorious from Terceira, Oquendo had stormed back to Court and complained that 'my enemies have waged war on me while I have been away, making accusations that are wholly untrue' explicitly to derail his knighthood. He also asserted that although he had indeed worked for a living, in Bilbao 'all the citizens, however noble, work for a living without compromising their noble status'. The Council of the Orders nevertheless 'resolved that he should not be given a knighthood for now', and the king had to obtain a papal dispensation to overrule them.[30]

Several of the Armada's military commanders also required similar royal intervention. Luzón did not receive a knighthood until 1598 because rumours that the Inquisition had burned one of his forebears at the stake for crypto-Judaism derailed previous nominations (although, as with Don Pedro de Valdés and Oquendo, some witnesses suggested that the rumours merely reflected efforts by local elite families to prevent him from getting a knighthood).[31] The Council's investigators discovered that the grandmother of Don Balthasar de Zúñiga, a staff officer aboard the flagship, was 'the granddaughter of the archbishop of Santiago, a priest'; and that the prince of Ascoli's mother was descended from a bishop who had converted from Judaism. In each case the king had to secure a papal dispensation before his nominee could receive a knighthood. Moreover, since 'the whole world' knew about such 'stains', they no doubt became the subject of gossip and jests aboard the fleet.[32]

The same was true of embarrassing misdeeds by other leading protagonists. During Holy Week 1581 a group of young courtiers in Madrid took advantage of the moment when all the candles in church are extinguished and the congregation makes a great noise during a 'Tenebrae' service, to kiss and grope any young women within range. Among those arrested, fined 2,000 ducats apiece and banished from Court were the count of Paredes, two sons of Don Diego de Córdoba (the king's chamberlain) and Ascoli. Not long after Ascoli's return to Court, he and another young aristocrat led their servants into the streets one night and began a serenade beneath a lady's balcony. High words attracted the attention of Don Diego de Córdoba's unruly sons and the rival groups soon 'drew their swords and slashed at each other' until relatives calmed them down. Once again the king exiled them all from Court.[33]

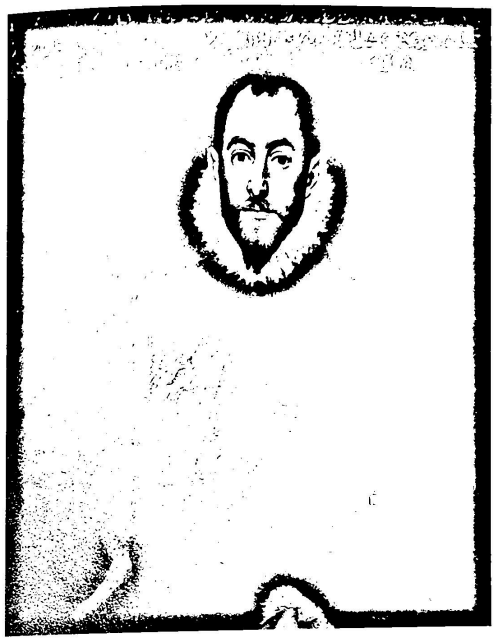
These miscreants were still in disgrace in March 1588 when Philip called on all noblemen to repair to Lisbon and join the Armada, and they seized the opportunity of redemption. Ascoli brought with him thirty-nine combat-ready servants, more than anyone else, so that he could (in Philip's words) 'follow in the footsteps of your ancestors by joining the Armada to serve me'. The king ordered Medina Sidonia 'to summon the prince to all meetings of the Council of War', and to 'listen to his

voice and opinion in the matters discussed there'. The duke complied, granting him a place of honour by his side on the flagship's quarterdeck despite the fact the prince was only twenty-four and lacked any military and naval experience.[34]

Other senior officers with chequered pasts included Juan Téllez Guzmán, marquis of Peñafiel and Medina Sidonia's cousin, sent to prison in 1587 after disgracing himself at Court. A year later he appeared in Lisbon as an *entretenido*, presumably after volunteering for the Armada in return for his freedom. Aged thirty-four, and accompanied by twenty-one retainers, the marquis embarked on the Portuguese warship *San Marcos*, commanded by Bobadilla; and when Bobadilla moved to the flagship to advise the duke on military matters, Peñafiel, despite his lack of naval experience, took command of the ship.[35]

Leyva, too, had once displeased the king. In 1581 Don Alonso threatened to kill a royal secretary suspected of adultery with the duke of Medina Sidonia's mother-in-law. Despite the duke's plea for clemency, Leyva was exiled from Court, but redeemed himself by serving on the Azores expedition the following year. In 1587 Philip sent him to Cadiz to help Medina Sidonia oversee the ships preparing to sail to Lisbon to join the Armada, 'on account of his experience and expertise in these matters'. Once in Lisbon, accompanied by thirty-six retainers, Don Alonso embarked on the great Genoese merchantman *Rata Encoronada* (Figure 12).[36]

Another former miscreant aboard the fleet was Captain Francisco de Cuéllar, who had enlisted while still a teenager as a soldier on the transatlantic guardships, and in 1580 took part in the conquest of Portugal. Cuéllar evidently served with distinction because the following year Philip appointed him 'captain on sea and land' of one of the warships led by Diego Flores into the South Atlantic; but he was accused of cowardice during the battle with the English and imprisoned aboard his own ship. He managed to clear his name soon after his return to Spain but did not receive his salary arrears until June 1587, when Philip sent Cuéllar and six other South Atlantic veteran officers to Lisbon to serve Santa Cruz on the Armada. Given their combat experience the seven expected to take command of one of the fighting ships, but by the time they arrived the marquis had already appointed 'gentlemen' (*hidalgos*) to every vacant post and so the newcomers sailed reluctantly to the Azores as staff officers. When they returned they refused to command lesser ships. Therefore, 'to avoid supporting vagabonds and men who shun the service of Your Majesty', the marquis 'dismissed them and terminated their salaries' and begged the king to 'make an example of them, as a warning to others' if they came to Court to complain. Instead, the captains swallowed their pride and agreed to serve as *entretenidos*. Cuéllar eventually sailed on *San Pedro*, one of the transatlantic guardships in



12. Portrait of Don Alonso de Leyva by El Greco, *c.* 1580. Don Alonso became a celebrity in 1578 when he raised a company of gentlemen volunteers in Italy and led them to fight for Don John of Austria, the king's brother, in the Netherlands. In 1586 some thought that he (rather than Santa Cruz) should command the royal fleet, because 'besides being a soldier as well as a sailor, he is affable and well-liked'; and a senior naval officer in Lisbon welcomed the chance 'to serve with such a famous soldier, and have him teach me the discipline of war' – unusually warm praise in a profession where criticisms far outnumbered compliments.[37]

the squadron of Castile, and just before she left Corunna his dream came true and he took over as her captain.[38]

Probably the best-known miscreant aboard the Armada was Lope de Vega, aged twenty-six. Royal magistrates had arrested him in a Madrid theatre the previous year on suspicion of circulating satires and, after a prison term, banished him not only from the Court but also from Castile. He reached Lisbon just in time to join Recalde aboard *San Juan de Portugal* and survived the journey to become Spain's most famous and prolific playwright. His participation in the Enterprise of England has been disputed, but his name appears clearly in a list of *aventureros* embarked on the fleet: 'Lope de Vega, from Madrid'.[39]

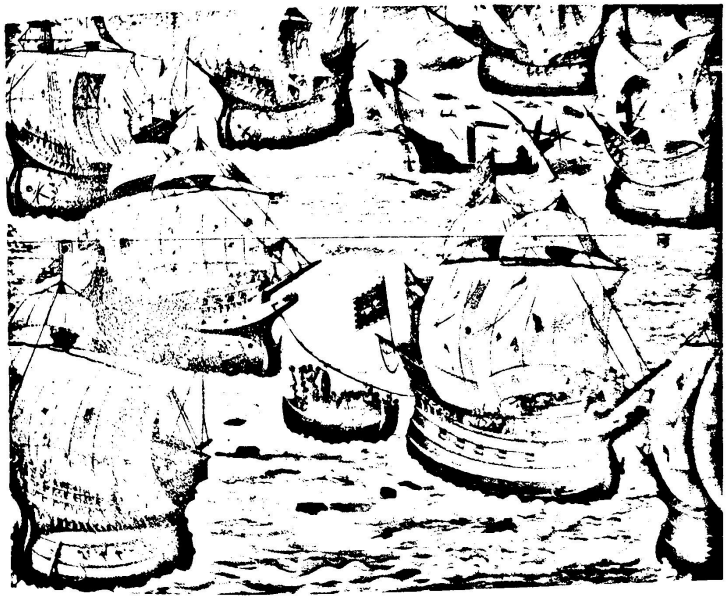
The Armada's command structure thus had serious weaknesses. So did its ships. As soon as Medina Sidonia arrived in Lisbon to take up his command in March 1588, he travelled around the fleet in a felucca (*falúa*) – one of ten small, sleek ships propelled by oars and sails, specially constructed in Lisbon the previous winter – and went aboard every ship anchored in the Tagus, even ordering the sails to be spread out on the decks for his inspection.[40] He asked each commander to submit a list of everything his ship lacked – cables, anchors, artillery, seamen, pilots and so on – and promised to supply them 'as fast as possible'. He shifted stores and munitions from ships he considered overloaded and paid special attention to the quantity of drinking water embarked. He then convened a committee of experienced subordinates to discuss how best to address the shortfalls. His hands-on approach and his efficiency, on which all his subordinates commented favourably, reflected his long experience of overseeing the dispatch of transatlantic convoys.

Governments in wartime often embargoed all large merchant ships found in local ports and afterwards selected those deemed suitable for amphibious operations which required the transfer of troops and munitions, paying the owner a fixed monthly rate for the ship and her crew until the end of the campaign. The Armada was no exception: embargoed merchantmen made up about two-thirds of the total (Figure 13 and Appendices 1–2). Some were constructed in Mediterranean ports, like *San Juan de Sicilia* from Ragusa, *Juliana* from Mataró in Catalonia and *Trinidad Valencera* from Venice (all in the Levant squadron). Others came from

13. Piece of carved decoration reused as part of a door but believed to have come from a wrecked Armada ship, now in the Clare Museum, Ennis, County Clare, Ireland. The curved plank clearly comes from a ship's hull, and the carving symbolizes a mercantile origin, with cornucopia, cloth-bale, barrels and books.

shipyards around the Atlantic, the Baltic and the North Sea, including *Gran Grifón* from Rostock (*urca*), *Santa María de la Rosa* from San Sebastián (Guipúzcoa), and *Nuestra Señora del Rosario* from Ribadeo (Andalucia). Most of the ships in the squadrons of Vizcaya and Andalucia, as well as the *pataches*, *zabras* and caravels used for communications, were also constructed in the shipyards of northern Spain.

Merchant ships need to transport large cargoes as economically as possible, which means capacious stowage and minimum operating costs; speed and manoeuvrability are less important. The hulls of European merchantmen – whether operating in the Mediterranean or the Atlantic – were therefore deep, tubby and box-like, with simple sailing rigs which required relatively few hands. The requirements for warships were the reverse: they needed to be fast and manageable, which meant the sacrifice of carrying capacity to create sufficient space for big guns that could engage an enemy at effective ranges, and embarking larger crews to serve them.



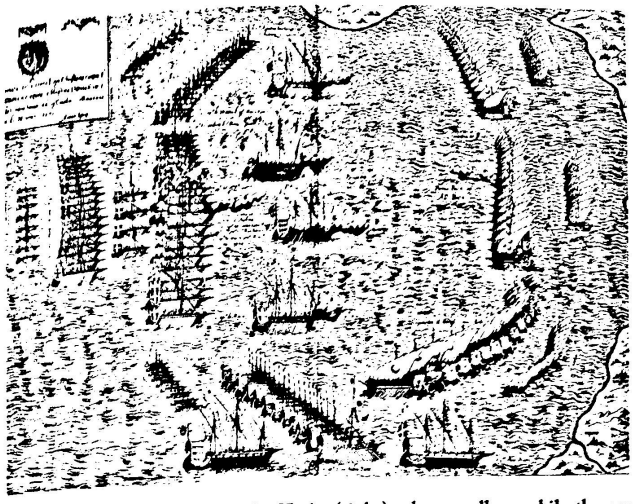
14. *San Martín*, right foreground, depicted in a fresco painted in the Hall of Battles at the Escorial to commemorate the naval victory of Santa Cruz off São Miguel in the Azores in 1582. Note the big guns on the two lower decks, the main deck and forecastle crowded with soldiers, and the holes in the sails caused by enemy fire. The boat towed behind her contains prisoners tied back-to-back. A friar hears their confessions before they are thrown into the sea to drown.

The Armada's vessels built specifically for combat fell into four categories. The squadron of Portugal included some of the largest sailing warships in the world. Medina Sidonia, like Santa Cruz before him, sailed in the flagship *San Martín*, built at Lisbon in the 1570s and carrying around fifty guns (different sources record slightly different totals) (Figure 14). She and *San Mateo* had played a prominent part in the battle off São Miguel, sustaining serious damage in the fight. The other seven galleons of the squadron were built in Portuguese shipyards after the Spanish conquest (Philip himself attended the launch of one of them, named *San Felipe* in his honour). Together with the galleass *Florencia* and two extra-large *zabras*, all had sailed to and from the Azores in 1587. Between them they carried around 400 guns, half of them large.

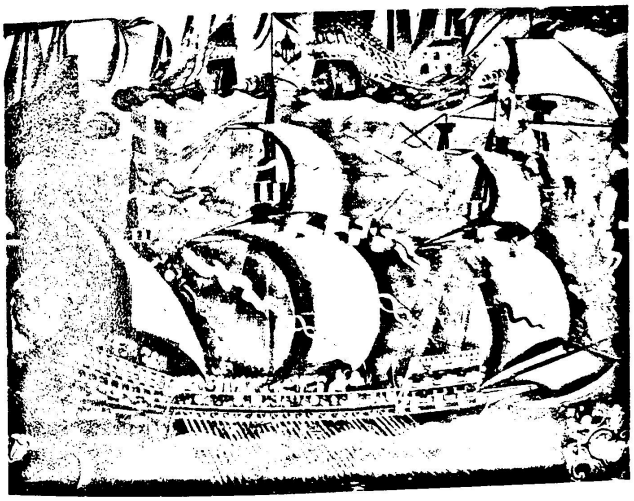
The squadron of Castile comprised smaller and faster fighting ships, built to escort the annual merchant convoys safely between Andalucia and Central America. The flagship, *San Cristóbal*, carried thirty-two guns; seven more warships had been built in shipyards near Santander to a standard design. The entire squadron carried almost 350 guns, a third of them large.

Galleys carried lateen sails which were used whenever conditions allowed, but for independent manoeuvre especially during battle their principal means of propulsion came from oarsmen, most but not all being prisoners or slaves (Figure 15). Designed explicitly for war, each galley carried a formidable array of artillery at the prow, which meant that (like a modern fighter aircraft) the whole platform had to manoeuvre to aim its ordnance. They could also perform vital work towing big sailing ships in confined waters and (thanks to their shallow draughts) the equally vital work of transferring men and munitions from ship to shore. Had they been available off Flanders in 1588 they could have protected Parma's landing-barges as they crossed the shallows where the deep-draught Armada ships could not operate. Some historians have seen the desire to include galleys in the Armada as a misplaced nostalgic reluctance to abandon a proven fighting machine, even though it was fundamentally unsuited to artillery-dominated naval warfare outside the Mediterranean. But both Medina Sidonia and Recalde wanted more of them.

Galleasses combined the capacious hull of a sailing ship with the ability to manoeuvre under oars. With a displacement roughly four times that of a galley, galleasses moved slowly when rowed, but in most conditions they could direct devastating firepower from the big guns on their fore- and aftercastles – some of them 50-pounders – at less adaptable sailing vessels. At Lepanto in 1571 six Venetian galleasses, operating in support of a conventional galley fleet, played a decisive role. But despite their impressive appearance, the galleasses' performance in the Armada campaign was to fall short of expectations (Figures 15, 16).



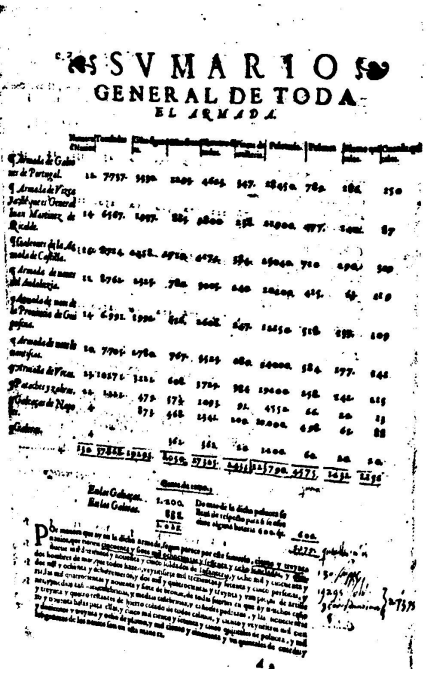
15. The battle of Lepanto, 1571. The Turks (right) rely on galleys, while the opposing Christian forces are led by larger galleasses carrying heavier artillery at their bows. Both sides are deployed in a half-moon formation, as the Armada would be.



16. A galleass, with her heavy guns mounted at bow and stern, and light swivel-pieces above the rowing bank. Valentine Dale, an English observer, commented on the vivid colours when he inspected the galleass *San Lorenzo* wrecked off Calais: 'The oars are all red, the sails had upon them the bloody sword [the red cross of holy war]; the upper part of the galleass was also red, signs and manifest tokens' – he continued self-righteously – 'of the bloody mind' that had sent them. The colour scheme is confirmed by this image (detail from the 'Greenwich Cartoon', Figure 35).

On 9 May Medina Sidonia's printer issued a pamphlet of forty-four pages, often known as the 'Lisbon muster', entitled *The Most Happy Armada that our Lord King Philip has ordered to assemble in Lisbon harbour*, filled with details on every ship, arranged by squadron, including the guns, munitions, soldiers and seamen aboard, as well as the names of all the officers, *entretenidos* and *aventureros*, and a note of the religious orders to which the 180 clerics aboard the fleet belonged (Figure 17).

It may seem curious that this compendium of information, which would today be classified as Top Secret, was published and disseminated by Medina Sidonia. The idea evidently originated with the duke because when one of the printed copies reached the Royal Palace on 3 June, Philip's private secretary forwarded it with the wry comment 'It's very detailed'. The king was furious: 'Yes indeed,' he scribbled. 'Printing these things could prove very dangerous, especially so early, because it will make our enemies aware of them.' Later, however, he accepted that the document might intimidate his enemies and impress his allies, letting all Europe know that the conquest had been achieved by Spanish arms and treasure (perhaps rendering more acceptable the king's claim to choose England's next monarch). Further editions soon appeared in Naples, Rome, Milan, Cologne and Paris.[41]


SVMARIO
GENERAL DE TODA
EL ARMADA

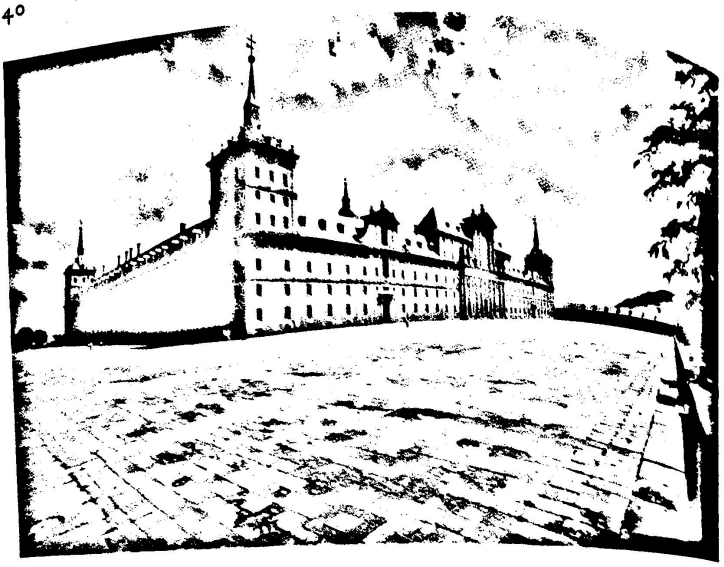
17. A page from the pamphlet *La felicíssima Armada*, printed at Lisbon on 9 May 1588, summarising the totals of the ships, soldiers, seamen, artillery pieces, powder, shot and so on. The only omission was the names of the 200 embittered English and Irish exiles aboard. This copy came into the hands of Lord Burghley, Elizabeth's chief minister, who translated the totals into English (bottom right).

Table 1.1. *The squadrons making up the Spanish fleet, as they left Corunna*[42]

Squadron	Fighting ships	Support vessels	Total ships	Total sailors	Total rowers	Total soldiers	Total guns
Portugal	9	2	11	1,058	–	2,647	266
Castile	14	2	16	1,078	–	2,579	326
Galleys	4	0	4	74	910	148	20
Galleasses	4	0	4	446	1,200	890	200
Vizcaya	10	4	14	800	–	1,986	234
Andalucia	10	1	11	720	–	2,089	251
Guipúzcoa	10	4	14	715	–	1,821	256
Levant	11/12	0	11/12	810	–	2,865	324
Urcas	22	0	22	646	–	2,375	387
Pataches & *zabras*	3	20/23	23/26	564	–	195	114
Total	97/98	33/36	130/134	6,911	2,110	17,595	2,378
Caravels & feluccas	–	16/17	16/17	?	42	–	–
TOTAL	97/98	49/53	146/151	6,911	2,152	17,595	2,378

Master of the Armada

Why did Medina Sidonia's pamphlet, printed at Lisbon on 9 May 1588, take more than three weeks to reach the king's desk? In part, the explanation lies in Philip's decision in 1583 to leave Portugal and return to Castile. Almost all letters and papers addressed to him were reviewed by one of the advisory Councils which met in the royal palace in Madrid: the Council of State for foreign policy, the Council of War for defence, the Council of the Inquisition for the affairs of the Holy Office; and so on. The Councils would forward each incoming paper to the king with a summary and suggest an appropriate response in a document known as a *consulta*. Philip read each *consulta* and either wrote or dictated his response. In winter he, too, resided in Madrid but in other seasons he divided his time between nearby secluded retreats, above all San Lorenzo El Real de El Escorial 50 miles north-west of Madrid in the Guadarrama mountains. There, from a small study overlooking the High Altar, Philip sought to run a global empire upon which the sun never set (Figures 18, 19).



18. The Escorial. Constructed under Philip II's personal direction, started in 1563 and completed in 1584. He intended the complex to serve as a monastery, library, seminary and family mausoleum as well as a royal palace.

Herein lay the first reason for the late arrival of Medina Sidonia's pamphlet describing the Armada: even the fastest courier required four days to ride between Madrid and Lisbon, and another day between Madrid and the Escorial. Distance explains a delay of a week, however, not almost a month. That stemmed from Philip's style of government.

The king abhorred personal interviews, preferring to transact all business in writing. In 1576, when rejecting the request of a senior military adviser for an interview, he informed his secretary: 'I would be glad to see him, but in all honesty I have very little time. And anyway,' he added, 'I forget so much of what is said to me at audiences.' Two years later, when Medina Sidonia asked for an audience to discuss how best to execute Philip's policy towards Morocco, the king replied: 'If you happened to be close to court, it might be useful to hear the details from you in person; but since your letters will be delivered to me in complete secrecy, I think it would be best if you wrote.'[43]

This was Philip's standard response: he insisted on receiving all information in writing. During the invasion of Portugal in 1580 he instructed his principal field commander 'to let me know *every day* what is going on'; and eight years later, during the Armada campaign, the king instructed his ambassador in Paris 'to advise me of

everything minute by minute'. His ministers complied, and the torrent of incoming information convinced the king that he – and only he – had the 'big picture' necessary to take the correct decisions.[44]

To keep up with this torrent Philip worked on his papers for eight or nine hours almost every day, reading incoming letters and *consultas* before taking the final decisions himself, which he communicated to one of his secretaries either in a separate *billete* (note) or scrawled in the left-hand margin of the incoming document (left wide for this purpose). The king also signed most outgoing documents in person, up to 400 letters in a single morning (or so he once claimed). In 1575 an English diplomat in Madrid reported that Philip 'writes and dispatches by *billetes* more (they say) than all his secretaries'. A decade later, according to the Venetian ambassador:

> Someone who frequents the king's private apartments informs me that he is never idle, for besides his desire to read himself all the incoming and

19. Hub of empire: Philip II's study in the Escorial Palace. Note the original clock on the king's desk, with a candle in front of the clock face. The brass surround contains a reservoir of oil to keep the candle burning, so that Philip could keep track of time as he worked night and day. The window at the back connects with the High Altar in the Basilica, so that the king could also keep track of liturgical time. A picture of St Lawrence's martyrdom hangs to the right of the desk.

> outgoing correspondence from all areas, and from all the ambassadors and ministers of his vast dominions . . . he covers every day with his own hand more than a ream of paper.[45]

Long before the typewriter, the photocopier and the word processor, Philip was drowning in a sea of paper. And he knew it. 'I have 100,000 papers in front of me,' he began one frantic note to a secretary; and one night in 1578 he complained to Mateo Vázquez:

> I have just been given this other packet of papers from you, but I have neither the time nor the strength to look at it; and so I will not open it until tomorrow. It is already after ten o'clock and I have not yet had dinner. My table is full of papers for tomorrow because I cannot cope with any more today.

A few months later he lapsed into self-pity. So many 'matters have come up that cannot be neglected: I do not believe that any human resources would suffice to deal with them all – especially not mine, which are very weak and getting weaker every day with all the things that have to be done.' Occasionally the number of pending decisions caused the king to lose his temper. One day in 1581 he complained to Vázquez that:

> Some things are going to have to wait, because one cannot do everything at once. Try to do something to hold them up because I cannot take any more. Anyone who looks at how I spent today will see that just two men detained me for more than two hours and left me with more papers than I can manage in many more [hours]. So I am shattered. God give me strength and patience.[46]

The king expected God to provide not only strength and patience, but also miracles to bridge the gap between intention and achievement, between means and ends. As bad news poured in from his commanders in the Netherlands and the Mediterranean in 1574, Philip warned Vázquez that 'unless God performs a miracle, which our sins do not merit, it is no longer possible to maintain ourselves for [more than a few] months, let alone years'. The arrival of news of further reverses, instead of leading him to reconsider his unsuccessful policies, reinforced the king's expectation of divine intervention. 'May God help us with a miracle. I tell you that we need one so much that it seems to me that He *must* choose to give us a miracle,' he lamented, 'because without one I fear everything will descend into the worst situation imaginable.'[47]

Philip's conviction that his policies advanced God's cause often led to friction with those responsible for executing them. When his lieutenants challenged a royal order to invade England in winter 1587, he blandly replied: 'We are quite aware of the risk that is incurred by sending a major fleet in winter through the Channel without a safe harbour, but . . . since it is all for His cause, God will send good weather.' In March 1588 he saw the delays in getting the Armada to sea in terms of a divine test: 'We must believe that Our Lord has permitted these setbacks so that, when they have been overcome with His assistance, we will see more clearly how we owe our success to Him.' A few weeks later, with Easter approaching, the king insisted that everyone aboard the fleet 'must avoid oaths, blasphemy and other offences against Our Lord, because earning His favour in this way [*granjear con esto su favor*] is the best path to victory'.[48]

The Armada and the Supernatural

A few Catholics dissented. The coincidence of a partial solar and a total lunar eclipse early in 1588, following a rare astronomical alignment of Saturn, Jupiter and Mars, led many to foretell an imminent catastrophe. In Carmagnola, a French enclave in the Alps, Giorgio Rizzacasa published a book of predictions in 1586 which claimed that if Philip 'lives for two more years – which according to the stars seems highly doubtful – he will experience ill luck [*infelice sorte*] in almost all his actions', especially those involving the sea. In Rome, Joseph Creswell, a Jesuit chosen by the pope to help re-catholicize his native England should the Armada succeed, went to consult 'a holy man who enjoyed such contact with Our Lord that he might well have known something of His plans'. The 'holy man' discouragingly but accurately predicted that the fleet would 'go up in smoke', and Creswell remained in Rome.[49]

Similar prophecies of doom circulated in Spain. Those of Lucrecia de León, a young woman who lived in Madrid, attracted widespread attention after she predicted the death of Santa Cruz three weeks before it happened. She had already foretold the victory of Francis Drake (Lucrecia was very specific) in a great naval battle against the marquis, and on 1 May 1588 she described a dream that showed St James – 'Santiago', Spain's patron saint – riding behind the Armada on a horse with no legs, holding a lance with no point, proclaiming 'I keep my strength for God's war' – implying that the Armada sailed only to satisfy Philip's pride. Lucrecia's dreams, and the predictions of other popular prophets like Miguel de Piedrola, achieved such fame that a 400-page *Treatise of true and false prophecy* denounced those who 'foretold that Spain would be lost in this year of 88' and reassured readers

that 'the Devil may well want to prevent the Enterprise of England, which with God's help is under way, and to this end He may spread fear and misgivings; but this will avail him little because God has imbued those who will command it with great dedication' as well as great confidence.[50]

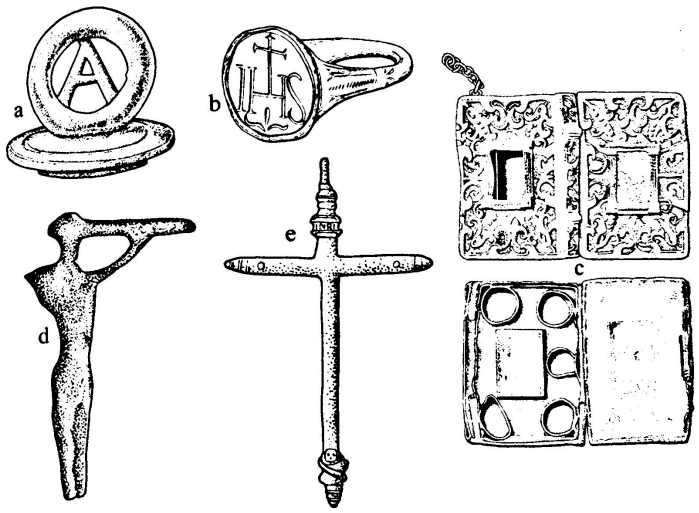
As the Armada prepared to set sail, conventional religious faith permeated Spain despite the prophets of doom. Pedro de Ribadeneira, a prominent Jesuit, composed an *Exhortation to the soldiers and captains who sail on this campaign to England* that confidently asserted: 'We are not going on a difficult enterprise, because God our Lord, whose cause and most holy faith we defend, will go before us; and with such a captain we have nothing to fear.' In Rome, the pope granted a Jubilee Indulgence not only to all who sailed on the Armada but also to those who prayed for its success. All over Spain religious processions to implore divine favour took place every Sunday and holiday, and in Madrid a printed pocket itinerary was published to guide the faithful from church to church on their quest for the Armada indulgence. In the Escorial the entire royal family spent three hours daily in relays at prayer before the Holy Sacrament.[51] All the Italian ambassadors at the Court of Spain shared Philip's confidence that the Armada would triumph since (in the words of one) 'we have God on our side, and it is to be believed that He will not abandon His cause, which in this case is the same as that of His Majesty'.[52]

The General Orders issued to the fleet by Medina Sidonia on 21 May 1588 exuded a similar confidence in divine favour. 'First and foremost,' they began, everyone:

> From the most senior to the most junior, must understand that His Majesty's principal motive in preparing and undertaking this venture has always been the service of God our Lord, and to bring back to the church many countries and souls oppressed by the heretics, enemies of our Holy Catholic Church, who have forced them to join their sects and errors. To ensure that everyone remains focused on this goal, as we are obliged to do, [all officers] must order everyone under their command to embark only after confessing and taking communion, with the great contrition for their sins that I hope they will show, so that God will guide and lead us.

The duke also decreed punishment 'at my discretion' for 'any soldier, sailor or other person in the Armada' who blasphemed or profaned 'the name of God, Our Lady, or the saints' during the voyage; and according to one report the duke ordered each captain to submit a list of all women (*Weibsbilder*) aboard their ship and 'they found somewhat more than 600. They were not only brought ashore but expelled

from Lisbon . . . This made the soldiers restless, but they were consoled by the thought that there were many pretty girls [*hübsche Weiber*] in England'. To cover all eventualities, the duke asked his confessor to secure absolution in advance for 'any excesses and sins' that his men might commit, either aboard the fleet or ashore in England.[53] He also ensured that religious calls, or summons, regulated all shipboard routines. At dawn each day the ships' boys chanted the *Salve* at the foot of the mainmast, and at sunset the *Ave Maria*. Time was marked by a thirty-minute sand glass, each turn being accompanied by a short prayer. Eight such half-hourly spells marked the passage of a four-hour watch, and on the seventh call the off-duty crew prepared to take over. On Saturdays they sang the *Salve* and the *Litany of Our Lady* (Figure 20).



20. Religious finds from the *Girona* wreck-site include: a) a silver-gilt lid from a set of altar vessels (the 'A' denotes Aqua); b) a gold ring with circular bezel inscribed IHS, the sacred monogram; c) a gold box in the form of a book decorated with a representation of St John the Baptist; its interior is divided into five circular compartments within which were traces of wax, identifying them as having held Agnus Dei discs (these were made in vast numbers by melting the wax from the previous year's Easter candles from the churches in Rome, and were blessed by the pope); d) part of a silver crucifix, eroded by movement on the seabed; e) a copper-alloy pectoral crucifix, with INRI inscribed near the top (you can see the holes where the body was fitted).

The duke himself displayed great personal devotion. On hearing of his appointment, Ribadeneira speculated that 'God Himself chose him as commander of the Armada, and as His instrument to carry out such a holy and glorious enterprise' on account of Medina Sidonia's exemplary piety. While waiting for a favourable wind in May the duke consulted not only Sor María de la Visitación but also 'a saintly friar called Antonio de la Concepción, whenever I can, and he is very confident that Our Lord will grant Your Majesty a great victory'.[54]

His deputy, Juan Martínez de Recalde, showed equal devotion. In July 1588, when illness kept him confined to his bed, 'I placed certain holy relics on my liver and my arm' to help them recover; and when the fleet survived severe storms virtually intact, Recalde opined that 'God reunited the fleet almost as fast as He dispersed it to make us understand that without His favour we can achieve nothing. And since He has reunited it, He wants us to achieve our goal and His service.' Recalde also had a conscience. In 1577, just before leaving the Netherlands after five years of bitter fighting, he appeared before the magistrates of Antwerp and offered to satisfy anyone who could substantiate a claim against him. Six years later, after returning from the victorious Terceira campaign, he 'retired to a convent to do penance' for his part in the sack of the island. He would do the same after returning from the Armada campaign to expiate his part in its failure.[55]

Other senior officers shared these values. Diego Flores had placed one of his daughters in a nunnery, and he owned one silver and one gold cross, a religious medal and several relics. Oquendo owned a portable altar, two religious statues, and several paintings of the Virgin Mary and the Saints. In January 1588, with the Armada confined to the Tagus, Oquendo felt sure that all would be well, 'if we just fulfil our own obligations and leave the rest to Him who has the power'. Two months later he declared that 'even if we sail with few men and little artillery, I trust in God that we will do our duty' and therefore prevail over the heretical English.[56] Leyva felt the same. As he boarded a galleass for the journey from Cadiz to Lisbon in July 1587, Don Alonso looked forward to 'the victory that we hope God will give to this fleet'; and nine months later, windbound in the Tagus, he felt confident 'that God will soon send a favourable wind, and that this magnificent fleet [*tan suntuosa armada*] will make good use of it'. Even after he grasped the reality of the Armada's defeat, he wrote two letters which invoked 'God' eleven times in just over 1,000 words.[57]

A few days before the standard-blessing ceremony, a papal agent in Lisbon asked a senior Armada officer in confidence, 'If you meet the English fleet in the Channel, do you expect to win the battle?' 'Of course,' replied the officer. 'How can you be so sure?' asked the emissary. The officer responded:

> It is well known that we fight in God's cause. So, when we meet the English, God will surely arrange matters so that we can grapple and board them, either by sending some strange freak of weather or, more likely, just by depriving the English of their wits. If we can come to close quarters, Spanish valour and Spanish steel (and the great masses of soldiers we shall have on board) will make our victory certain. But unless God helps us by a miracle the English, who have faster and handier ships than ours, and many more long-range guns, and who know their advantage just as well as we do, will never close with us at all, but stand aloof and knock us to pieces with their culverins, without our being able to do them any serious hurt. So we are sailing against England in the confident hope of a miracle.[58]

Many historians have taken this response as irony, but at least one senior officer believed that he had already been saved by a miracle. In December 1585 Don Francisco de Bobadilla and some 3,000 Spanish soldiers fighting in the Low Countries found themselves trapped by Dutch forces on a tiny island between the rivers Maas and Waal. Surrender seemed inevitable until, following the discovery and veneration of a buried image of the Virgin Mary, a sudden fall in temperature froze the rivers and allowed Bobadilla to lead his troops to safety across the ice. Every devout Catholic regarded this as a miracle.

A Portuguese Jesuit aboard the fleet summarized the spiritual exaltation of his comrades on the eve of departure: 'Such was their confidence in God that there was not a man who could be persuaded of anything that went against this conviction: that God would grant them victory against the heretics and enemies of the Holy Catholic Church.' Their faith was apparently rewarded on 11 May, when a light easterly breeze sprang up. The duke ordered some of the bigger vessels to proceed to the mouth of the Tagus and anchor there, and he 'got into a felucca and sailed among them to speed things up'. He also 'saw to it that the galleys helped the *urcas* whenever they needed it' as they manoeuvred. That same day a special envoy sent by the duke of Parma, together with five pilots familiar with the Flemish coast, arrived at Lisbon with news of Parma's preparations.[59]

On 28 May, when the wind again blew from the east, the duke 'fired a gun', the signal for all ships to raise anchors. Once again, he 'boarded a felucca to get the Armada to sea' and the following day galleys towed his flagship and some other big vessels to the mouth of the Tagus. Two days later 130 large ships, ten caravels and ten feluccas had cleared the bar without the loss of a single vessel. When Medina Sidonia gave the order for 'the largest fleet that has ever been seen in these seas since the creation of the world' to turn northwards towards Parma's army, the world held its breath.[60]

2

'The great bog of Europe'

PHILIP II'S MASTERPLAN FOR THE conquest of England depended on the Armada 'joining hands' with an army of 27,000 soldiers, camped near the coast of Flanders and commanded by his nephew Alexander Farnese, duke of Parma. As soon as the fleet arrived, the king expected Parma and his men to embark on the 300 small invasion transports assembled in the harbours of Dunkirk and Nieuwpoort and cross the Channel to the designated landing-zone in Kent. But without the Armada's protection they would be helpless. In the shoal waters beyond the coastline they could glimpse the sails of shallow-draught Dutch gunboats, carrying 1,200 musketeers trained for naval combat and pledged to destroy any of Parma's forces that put to sea. Just over the horizon a squadron of larger Dutch warships, reinforced by Queen Elizabeth's Narrow Seas fleet, lay in wait to intercept and annihilate Parma's flotilla should it make a sudden dash for England.

Most accounts of the 1588 campaign concentrate on the naval battles of the main fleets as the Armada advanced up the Channel, and pay scant attention to the vigil maintained by the forces in the Dover Strait. But their role was just as important, because although the Armada sailed against England it also aimed to terminate a long-standing challenge to Spanish power in the Netherlands.

THE DUTCH REVOLT

The seventeen provinces of the Netherlands ruled by Emperor Charles V formed part of the world's first transatlantic empire, and when he abdicated in 1555 they all passed to his son Philip II. Some provinces, including the most prosperous – Brabant, Flanders, Hainaut, Holland and Zeeland – had been familiar with firm

government from Brussels for more than a century; other provinces, including Friesland, Gelderland, Groningen and Utrecht, had been annexed by Charles himself. The seventeen provinces received a single federal structure in 1548, becoming the newest state in Europe, but each retained a lively spirit of independence, accentuated by their distinct histories and traditions, their unique institutions, and their different languages: French in the south; German and East Dutch in the east; West Dutch and Fries in the north and west (Figure 21).

The Protestant faith, also born in the first half of the sixteenth century, found it easy to penetrate this patchwork of jurisdictions, customs and languages. Before long Calvinism, Anabaptism and Lutheranism all had their devotees in different parts of the Low Countries. It was to counter the spread of these heresies that in

21. South-east England and the Netherlands, 1588.

1559 Philip decided to increase the number of Catholic bishops in the Netherlands, to sharpen the laws against Protestantism and to extend the scope of the Inquisition.

All these initiatives required money, and money remained in short supply. In 1564 lack of funds had forced Philip to freeze the creation of new bishoprics, and two years later to suspend the enforcement of heresy laws and the activities of the Inquisition. The Protestants soon took advantage of these concessions. In spring 1566 they began to organize open-air prayer meetings defended by armed guards. In the summer the lack of a firm response by the central government led to a campaign of iconoclasm, in which small groups of Protestants first smashed Catholic religious images and then demanded the right to worship in churches as well as in the fields. According to Margaret of Parma, the king's sister and his regent in the Netherlands, by August half the local population had converted to Protestantism and 200,000 people had taken up arms against the government.

The king and his Spanish advisers took Margaret's highly alarmist (and, as it turned out, grossly exaggerated) estimates of Protestant strength at face value and resolved to send Spain's most experienced general, the duke of Alba, to the Netherlands at the head of 10,000 Spanish veterans, with orders to restore order and extinguish heresy. Alba and his soldiers marched from Lombardy to the Netherlands, arriving in August 1567. They immediately began to arrest and imprison dissidents.

The presence in the Netherlands of a professional army, commanded by the most successful general of his day, immediately transformed the international situation in northern Europe. The duke and his troops constituted a permanent challenge to the security of neighbouring states: France, England, Scotland and the semi-autonomous principalities of Germany. Their rulers now felt sufficiently threatened by Philip to offer support to the Protestant exiles and rebels led by William of Nassau, prince of Orange, when he invaded the Netherlands in 1568 and again in 1572. Although Orange's first attempt proved a costly failure, the second achieved partial success: the invaders gained control over much of Holland and Zeeland.

For three years the outcome lay in the balance. Not only did the impressive fortifications of many Dutch towns complicate Spain's reconquest: so did geography. The provinces in revolt, surrounded by the sea, were a confusion of broad rivers, islands and peninsulas. Lakes, marshes and waterways further impeded communications. In the words of an English traveller, Holland and Zeeland constituted 'The great bog of Europe. There is not such another marsh in the world, that's flat. They are an universal quagmire ... Indeed it is the buttock of the world: full of veins and blood, but no bones in't.'[1]

This 'buttock' was also defended by a fleet of ships able to operate close inshore and capable both of blockading all Netherlands ports loyal to the king and of

preventing vessels sent from Spain from landing troops on Dutch territory. In 1572 several ships from Spain, in a fleet commanded by Juan Martínez de Recalde, ran aground on the Flemish coast. Three years later most ships in a second fleet, jointly commanded by Recalde and Don Pedro de Valdés, failed to reach the Netherlands at all. Philip made no further attempt to gain control of the North Sea until 1588.

But Spain did not give up the struggle. Alba assembled a massive force of 60,000 soldiers, known to its contemporaries and to posterity as the 'Army of Flanders', and hurled it against one rebellious town after another: Mechelen, Zutphen and Naarden fell in 1572, Haarlem in 1573. His men sacked each of these towns and massacred a large part of their populations, irrespective of sex or age, and sometimes despite previous promises of clemency. But to no avail: Alba's draconian policy only intensified the resistance of the towns still in rebellion, and Philip recalled the duke in semi-disgrace at the end of 1573. This, too, failed to end the revolt. 'There would not be time or money enough in the world to reduce by force the twenty-four towns which have rebelled in Holland' and Zeeland, wrote Don Luis de Requesens, Alba's dispirited successor, in October 1574, 'if we are to spend as long in reducing each one of them as we have taken over similar ones so far'. Philip agreed. The fate of the Netherlands, he lamented, 'is very much at risk, with so many troops and no money to pay them ... Unless God performs a miracle, our affairs there cannot be improved without money.' Indeed, he sighed some days later, 'I think the Netherlands will be lost for lack of money, as I have always feared.'[2]

His fears soon came true. In September 1575, crippled by the cost of fighting constantly for more than three years, the Spanish treasury declared bankruptcy and the flow of money to the Army of Flanders abruptly ceased. The rebellious towns lit bonfires of joy when they heard the news, and with good reason: before long Philip's unpaid troops in Holland and Zeeland either deserted or mutinied. In November 1576 the Spanish infantry launched a desperate assault on Antwerp, the largest city in northern Europe, captured it, and then for several days carried out a brutal rampage in which they killed perhaps 8,000 people and destroyed 1,000 houses. It became known as 'the Spanish Fury'. The leading Catholics of the provinces still under Spanish control now made common cause with the Protestant rebels, led by Orange, who soon presided over a new 'government of national unity' established in Brussels and responsible to a States-General (parliament) representing all the provinces, languages and religions of the Netherlands.

This marked the high point of the Dutch Revolt. The States-General demanded that Philip accept them as his lawful government and that he appoint only officials of whom they approved. Even more provocatively they insisted on freedom of worship for Protestants throughout the Low Countries. No early-modern ruler could

accept such demands – not least because, as the king's advisers in Spain pointed out, concessions in the Netherlands would probably lead to similar demands from his other dominions. Instead, Philip decided to use force to regain his defiant provinces and began to rebuild the Army of Flanders. Troops and treasure assembled in Spanish Lombardy travelled to the Low Countries via the 700-mile military corridor established by the duke of Alba, known to contemporaries as 'the Spanish Road', to defeat the Dutch by attrition and weight of numbers. From the autumn of 1578 these formidable troops were moulded into a superb fighting force by the tough and energetic prince (and later duke) of Parma.

Parma was an ideal choice as commander-in-chief. In the first place, as Philip's nephew, his royal blood entitled him to deal directly with sovereign rulers and gave him an effortless social superiority over the prickly Netherlands aristocracy. Secondly, he had grown up at the Court of Spain, where he developed useful contacts among the king's ministers and at the same time learned the complex processes by which policies were made (and unmade) at the highest levels. Thirdly, his wide travels provided a valuable appreciation of Europe's geography. In 1557 he had accompanied Philip to England and thirty years later, on the eve of his planned invasion, he reminisced about the pleasures of Greenwich Palace because 'he knew the place well, for that he was there, being then young'. The prince also became fluent in French, German and Spanish as well as in his native Italian. He then served as a staff officer in the Spanish Mediterranean fleet and took part in the great naval battle of Lepanto in 1571 (Figure 22).[3]

22. Alexander Farnese, duke of Parma (1545–92), by his Court painter Otto van Veen, *c.* 1585. He wears his insignia of the Golden Fleece and an exquisite suit of armour, giving him a regal aura.

Although only thirty-two when he took command of the Army of Flanders in 1578, Parma could draw on extensive political and military experience. He also possessed impressive personal resources. In most years his Italian estates sent 50,000 ducats to support his household in Flanders, and he raised far more – by 1592 almost 1 million ducats – in loans secured on his personal credit. Parma used these funds to maintain his own diplomatic service and a glittering court, and to attract an entourage of noblemen who came to 'learn the art of war in his school'. When Amadeus, brother of the duke of Savoy, arrived in 1587 with strict orders to participate in 'all military endeavours', he joined relatives of the duke of Mantua and the grand duke of Tuscany, attached to Parma's headquarters. That same year Don Juan de Idiáquez, Philip's secretary of state, sent his son and heir Alonso to lead one of the cavalry companies earmarked for the invasion army from Flanders. Several senior officers who sailed on the Armada – including Bobadilla, Leyva and Mexía – had also served in Parma's 'school' and had come to admire and respect him.[4]

The Spanish Reconquest

This formidable combination of power and influence enabled Parma to offer a wide range of rewards, bribes and promises at opportune moments to advance his cause. In 1578–9 his subtle diplomacy drew the Catholics of the southern Netherlands back into the royalist camp, and throughout the 1580s he secured the surrender of numerous strongholds without a siege. As an English officer fighting with the Dutch army bitterly remarked on hearing of the premature capitulation of yet another town: 'Everyone knows that the king of Spain's golden bullets made a bigger breach in the heart of the traitor in command than their battery' made in the walls.[5] Parma proved equally adept in the use of force. On the one hand he tried to murder those who refused his bribes. At Philip's instigation he placed a price on the head of William of Orange, and sponsored various would-be assassins until in 1584, in return for 25,000 ducats and a patent of nobility, one of them succeeded. On the other hand his 60,000 soldiers – Spaniards, Italians, Burgundians, Germans, and some English and Irish Catholics as well as native levies – compelled more than seventy rebellious towns to surrender.

In 1581 Parma devised a grand strategy which would double the size of the Spanish Netherlands. Observing that Flanders and Brabant, the richest provinces in revolt, depended for their prosperity on waterborne trade, the duke realized that if he could control the Flemish coast and block the Scheldt below Antwerp the

entire inland network of rivers and canals would be paralysed. Without access to the sea all the major towns caught in his net would have to submit.

Parma's neighbours in north-west Europe viewed each success with grave dismay. The 'great bog' occupied a position of permanent strategic importance, since an army stationed there could intervene in France and the Rhineland or even, given a fleet, in England and Scotland. That is why the creation of the powerful Army of Flanders, first under Alba and again under Parma, caused a diplomatic revolution in northern Europe.

Looking back in 1589, Elizabeth I's principal adviser, William Cecil, Lord Burghley (born in 1520), mused that 'The state of the world is marvellously changed, when we true Englishmen have cause for our own quietness to wish good success to a French king and a king of Scots.' For the previous 500 years England had generally opposed – and often made war on – the rulers of France and Scotland, usually in alliance with the rulers of the Netherlands. Admittedly, Burghley continued, the two kings 'differ one from another in profession of religion, but seeing both are enemies to our enemies, we have cause to join with them in their actions'. He saw this change as 'the work of God for our good' and expressed gratitude for 'His miraculous goodness, for no wit of man could otherwise have wrought it'.[6]

The rulers of England, France and Scotland therefore welcomed the continuance of a rebellion in the Low Countries because it absorbed a large part of Philip's resources in fighting a war which he seemed unable to win. Thus in 1572 virtually all the Netherlands' neighbours sent support to William of Orange's invasion; in 1574, when the rebel cause seemed to be faltering, France began to send regular subsidies; and in 1578, as Spanish military success recommenced, France and England again took the overtly hostile step of sending troops to fight for the Dutch.

Nevertheless, when Parma launched his master strategy in 1581 the Dutch Revolt seemed doomed. The religious divide made the Catholic and Calvinist rebels uneasy bedfellows; petty provincialism made Holland and Zeeland reluctant to pay for the defence of Brabant; above all, the rebellion seemed likely to collapse (according to an English observer) 'for want of good government; for there is a number that commands in the country, and few will obey'. A few months later he repeated: 'Every man will command, and few . . . will be commanded, so there is no order nor good government among them.'[7]

For a while it seemed he spoke too soon, because the prince of Orange persuaded François de Valois, duke of Anjou and heir presumptive to the French throne, to become 'prince and lord of the Netherlands'. In 1581 the States-General declared Philip deposed from all his Netherlands titles, and Anjou arrived at the head of 10,000 troops to take over. Furthermore, he declared that he would

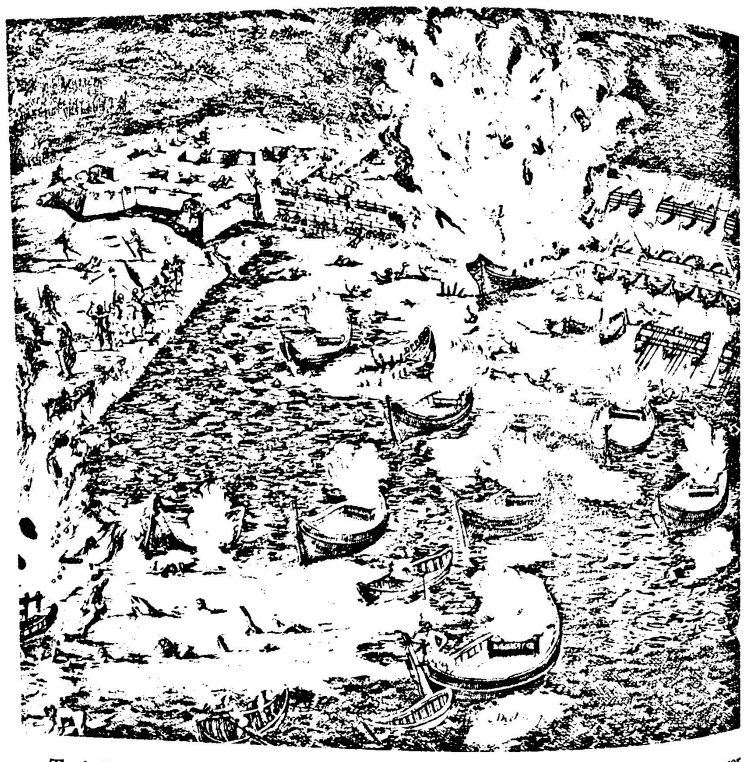
persuade the queen of England to marry him and place her resources alongside his in the defence of Dutch liberty. 'Froggy' (as the contemporary English song had it) 'went a wooing' and in February 1582 returned to the Netherlands claiming that he was engaged to Elizabeth, and bringing with him as a token of this new attachment her favourite, Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, and her secretary of state, Sir Francis Walsingham. They all attended a ceremony at which William of Orange, in the name of the States-General, invested Anjou with the regalia and dignities of the dukes of Brabant. Representatives of the other provinces soon followed suit and the duke, his new titles officially recognized by both France and England, became in effect sovereign ruler of the provinces in revolt against Philip.

It did not last. First, in March 1582 an assassination attempt plotted by Parma left William of Orange seriously injured. While he convalesced, Anjou and the States-General fell into disagreement. Early in 1583 the duke's French troops attempted to take control of the leading Low Countries towns, but they failed and Anjou left the Netherlands in disgrace. He died a year later.

Parma's accomplished veterans exploited the confusion to capture most of the ports along the Flemish coast and then struck inland, capturing Bruges and Ghent, the largest towns of Flanders. In September 1584 they began a huge engineering project to close the Scheldt some 30 miles below Antwerp and so cut off all access to the sea. It consisted of a great timber bridge 800 yards long, its central section floating on anchored pontoons, defended by a complex of emplacements containing almost 200 guns, with booms moored upstream and downstream. Some regarded the bridge, completed at the end of February 1585, as one of the wonders of the age and Parma staked everything upon its success: 'The siege will never be abandoned,' he boasted to a visitor, 'and this' – pointing to the bridge – 'will either be my tomb or my pathway into Antwerp'.[8]

Many contemporaries considered Antwerp, with a population of 80,000 and a five-mile circuit of powerful modern fortifications, to be impregnable. Certainly, the States-General did little to help the city until April 1585, when a fleet from Holland commanded by Justinus of Nassau, Orange's illegitimate son, moved to the mouth of the Scheldt while several ships filled with explosives floated down the river on the ebb tide from the beleaguered city towards Parma's bridge. An Italian, Federico Giambelli, had designed these floating bombs with considerable ingenuity. He had constructed some to explode on impact, and others with delayed fuses to detonate as the ship neared the bridge. Others still were simple fireships, filled with devices which exploded when the heat reached them (Figure 23).

Just as Giambelli had intended, the unpredictability of his 'infernal machines' caused confusion and indecision among the Spaniards. The whole idea of explosive ships was new, and few appreciated the cataclysmic danger they presented. When the largest 'hellburner', which had been set to blow up almost harmlessly in the middle of the river just short of its target, spewed out its colourful pyrotechnics, the defenders of the bridge gathered to watch the display. Even Parma came for a while, and he had only just started back for his headquarters when one of the other vessels, primed to explode on impact, hit the bridge. At least 800 Spaniards



23. The hellburners of Antwerp. Detail from one of five engravings of Parma's bridge over the Scheldt included in *The Low Countries Wars* by the Jesuit historian Famiano Strada, commissioned by Parma's son to write a history of his father's exploits. The artist captured the moment when one of the 'infernal machines' constructed by Federico Giambelli struck the boats in the centre of the bridge. The other incendiary devices burn harmlessly in the river. Over ninety editions of Strada's work had appeared in various languages by 1700.

were killed, many more were injured, and Parma himself was knocked down by the shockwave. The terrible experience of the exploding ships was not easily forgotten and the 'hellburners of Antwerp' entered the vocabulary, and the irrational fears, of every Spanish soldier and sailor. Nevertheless, Parma's seasoned troops soon recovered their discipline and their wits: they temporarily made good the damage, stood to their battle stations, and prevented Justinus and his fleet from exploiting their advantage. Antwerp surrendered in August 1585.

Parma had achieved a great deal against heavy odds. Within four years he had driven those in revolt against Philip back into an enclave scarcely larger than they had held in 1572, and the surrender of Antwerp allowed him to contemplate how best to complete the reconquest with the formidable cosmopolitan army he commanded. Its soldiers came from a wide range of social and geographical backgrounds. Some were outlaws who had enlisted to escape punishment at home, others were the younger sons of noblemen seeking glory; the troops from Spain, Italy and Burgundy had marched up the Spanish Road to join units raised in Germany and the Netherlands; some officers and men had thirty years of active service – in effect, Parma's army had become their home. Their integration is reflected in the friendly games they played on holidays, which pitted teams from north of the Alps (the *oltramontani*) against those from further south (the *citramontani*). In the words of Paolo Rinaldi, Parma's chamberlain and chronicler, the soldiers of the Army of Flanders 'were powerful men, well-armed and of martial aspect, highly trained and always ready to obey and to fight'.[9]

Englishmen who had seen the Army of Flanders in action shared Rinaldi's high opinion. George Gascoigne, an eyewitness, viewed the storm and capture of Antwerp in 1576 as a 'victory being miraculous and past man's capacity to comprehend how it should be possible' and attributed the outcome to the 'order and valour' of the Spanish infantry, adding: 'Caesar himself had never any such soldiers' because 'their continual training in service doth make them expert in all warlike stratagems'. Sir Roger Williams, who later advised Elizabeth on how to defend England against an invasion, agreed: 'To speak truth,' he wrote, 'no army that ever I saw, passes that of the duke of Parma for discipline and good order.' And Sir Roger had good reason to know, because he had fought with the Spaniards in the Netherlands from 1574 until 1578, and thereafter against them. The earl of Leicester, in command of England's land forces at Tilbury in the summer of 1588, had likewise seen the Army of Flanders in action, and deemed them 'the best soldiers at this day in Christendom'. Parma commanded the perfect instrument to achieve military success.[10]

The Dutch, in contrast, were losing the ability and will to resist. They had failed to save any of the towns of Flanders and Brabant from capture, and now they were

bankrupt. In 1583 lack of funds forced them to suspend interest payments on state debts, and even the tomb of the prince of Orange was (according to an English visitor) 'the poorest that ever I saw for such a person, being only of rough stones and mortar, with posts of wood coloured over with black'.[11] The Dutch lacked not only money but also leaders. If their problem in 1581 had been too many commanders, by 1584–5 they had too few: following the assassination of Orange no one in the young Republic had adequate experience of war or diplomacy. Orange's son Maurice, although allowed to succeed his father as governor of Holland and Zeeland, was only seventeen, and many years would pass before he gained the skill and sagacity required to reconcile the differing interest groups within the Dutch state. Indeed, in the wake of Parma's victories, a vociferous peace party grew up within the rebels' ranks, anxious to make a deal with their former master while they still had something to bargain with. In July 1585, when the States of Holland proposed to levy another tax for the defence of Brabant, the town council of Gouda (in Holland) withheld its consent and argued instead for immediate negotiations with Spain for 'a good peace'. Only the dispatch of loyal troops brought Gouda to heel.

Perhaps, Parma mused, he should exploit these divisions by invading Holland and Zeeland as Alba and Requesens had done, and hope for the best; but the experience of 1572–5 had demonstrated the dangers and difficulties of that course. Moreover, it had proved so difficult to regain the major towns of Flanders and Brabant that ultimate success sometimes seemed miraculous – but one day, Parma reminded Philip, 'God will grow tired of working miracles for us.' He therefore concluded that negotiation was a better option for bringing the Dutch Revolt to an end, but the States-General refused to negotiate. Despite the loss of Antwerp, he complained, they 'show no sign of anything except renewed obstinacy'. Why?[12]

Parma harboured no doubts. In September 1585 he informed the king that 'English troops are arriving [in Flushing] every day, and already number four or five thousand men. It seems that the queen of England wishes openly to take up the [rebel] cause ... for one can clearly see from the letter she has written to them how much assistance and encouragement she is prepared to give'. It might therefore be easier and more effective, he reasoned, to divert his forces from fighting the Dutch – who were certainly in no position to mount a counter-attack – and instead eliminate their foreign supporters. With the outbreak of civil dissension in France following the death of Anjou, further assistance from that quarter seemed unlikely; and, for the same reason, no French reprisals would be possible should Spain decide to deal with the Dutch rebels' other persistent supporter across the English Channel. In December 1585 he urged Philip to mobilize his forces to destroy Elizabeth.[13]

Preparing for the Invasion

The king had reached the same conclusion and ordered the raising of troops in Spain to reinforce the Army of Flanders for an assault on England, but the hostility of France as well as England meant that recruits had to be transported to Genoa, and then march along the Spanish Road across the Alps. It took at least three months, and the journey left many men exhausted.

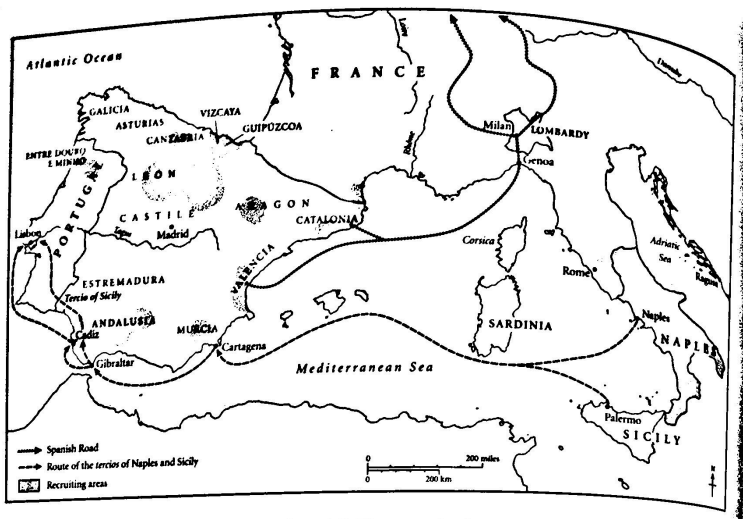
The build-up began with 2,000 recruits raised in Castile in the spring of 1586 by Don Antonio Manrique specifically for the Enterprise of England. On reaching Luxembourg the following December the survivors unslung their guitars and began to dance and sing, to the disgust of the veteran troops who never 'danced and whirled, an indecent thing in war, except with Flemish ladies'. The recruits became known as the *tercio de la zarabanda* (regiment of the saraband), because they carried on 'as if they were in Spain. But they very soon forgot the tunes and dances because the trials and miseries that befell them in the Low Countries gave them no more time for such diversion.' They also soon lost their commander: Manrique insulted and threatened the Judge Advocate General, forcing Parma to degrade and exile him ('the mildest punishment I could impose, given the nature of his offence'). He therefore redistributed Manrique's recruits to reinforce the veteran *tercios*, and to learn from them.[14]

In February 1587 the king decided to recruit two more Spanish *tercios* to reinforce Parma's army in preparation for the invasion of England: one in Castile under Don Antonio de Zúñiga, the other in Catalonia under Don Luis Queralt (Figure 24). When Zúñiga arrived in Genoa in August he led 2,662 men, but only 2,000 remained by the time they reached the Netherlands three months later, and 200 needed hospital treatment. According to Parma:

> They came not only without arms but also without clothes and they were badly treated. It is a shame to see them. So bad are they that I do not believe such misery has ever been seen in the Spanish nation, which makes me ashamed, not just on compassionate grounds but that soldiers of Your Majesty and of the Spanish nation should have been seen by people along their route so broken and ill-treated.

By the spring of 1588 only 1,500 men remained and Parma redistributed them to reinforce the veteran units.[15]

Queralt's *tercio* of 1,900 Catalans, many of them former bandits who had received a pardon in return for enlistment, also arrived in poor shape after the long



24. The areas of Spain and Italy where Philip recruited troops in 1587–8 intended for Flanders and Lisbon.

march along the Spanish Road, and by April 1588 their strength had fallen to 861. Parma only kept them as a separate *tercio* because of their distinctive language, which earned them the nickname 'the *tercio* of the parakeets [*tercio del papagayo*] because of how they sounded when they tried to speak Castilian with the rest of the troops'. Philip also authorized the levy of two *tercios* of Italians, one from the kingdom of Naples and the other from the states of his allies in central Italy, a total of 9,000 men. They, too, travelled up the Spanish Road in 1587 and suffered heavy losses along the way.

In February 1588 Parma estimated that the recruits newly arrived from Spain and Italy 'have diminished from their initial strength by at least one-third, with many more men sick'. This dramatic reduction reflected not only the recruits' lack of training in basic survival skills, but also the scarcity of food and shelter in the areas where Parma billeted them on arrival. '[It] may justly give cause of wonder how so many living in a wasted and greatly spoiled country should notwithstanding be victualled,' wrote an English observer. 'Viewing the country for the space of forty miles in length, and somewhat more,' he continued, 'the villages were desolated, and razed in a manner to the ground, no inhabitant to be found in them, scarcely any houses but here and there scattered.' Parma had achieved a major logistical triumph in maintaining so many men amid this unpromising environment.[16]

Early in July 1588 one of the Italian noblemen at Parma's headquarters reported that 'The soldiers are all standing by, close to Dunkirk and Nieuwpoort, and everything required for the Enterprise of England is ready.' Besides '4,000 gentlemen adventurers' like himself, he estimated the invasion army at 27,000 men, with 12,000 infantry and 2,000 cavalry remaining to defend the Netherlands (Table 2.1).[17]

Table 2.1. *Parma's invasion army*[18]

Units	Soldiers
4 Spanish *tercios*	6,000
3 Italian *tercios*	7,000
8 German regiments	12,000
11 Walloon regiments	16,000
1 Burgundian regiment	1,000
1 Irish regiment	1,000
15 cavalry companies	1,500

Cavalry made up only a small part of the invasion force: most of the animals carried by the Armada and accompanying Parma's troops were intended to draw the heavy artillery-train once it landed in England. Everything depended on the infantry recruited from all over the Habsburg lands in Europe. The Irish *tercio* formed an exception: most were Catholic infantry recruited to serve in the Dutch army who had changed sides the previous year, reinforced by some English Catholic exiles.

Of course, defects remained. In July 1588, only two weeks before the Armada arrived, Queralt begged Parma to 'order that we should be given weapons because (as your highness well knows) we lack them'. As soon as they had them, Queralt promised, 'I shall get the troops out once or twice a week, as I have already begun to do, and place them in formation and drill them as much as I can'; but without weapons, his men could not complete even basic training. Notwithstanding such shortcomings among some of the new recruits, however, both friends and foes agreed that Parma's invasion force was in superb shape to undertake the Enterprise of England.[19]

Evidence concerning the vessels assembled to carry the troops is more equivocal. As Sir William Winter, with a lifetime of naval experience behind him, observed in June 1588: